ALL ABOUT HISTORY

MEDIEVAL HISTORY

EXPLORE THE HEROES, VILLAINS, BATTLES AND DISCOVERIES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD FOREVER

KINGS & QUEENS ◆ CRUSADES & CONQUERORS ◆ LEGENDS & LEGACY

Digital Edition

FUTURE

SEVENTH EDITION

Welcome to
ALL ABOUT HISTORY
Book of
MEDIEVAL HISTORY

The Medieval era is often dismissed as a brutal period of darkness, ignorance, bloodshed and disease – the so-called 'Dark Ages' dividing classical antiquity from the age of enlightenment. But while warfare, invasions and religious persecution were certainly defining themes of the period, Medieval history is also filled with intrepid explorers, revolutionary artists and thinkers, and inspirational rulers whose legacies still live on to this day. In the All About History Book of Medieval History we explore some of the most fascinating stories from this tumultuous period, from the triumph of William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings to the brutal Spanish Inquisition begun by Isabella of Castile. Read on to discover tales of kings and queens, crusaders and criminals, popes and peasants, and more…

FUTURE

MEDIEVAL HISTORY

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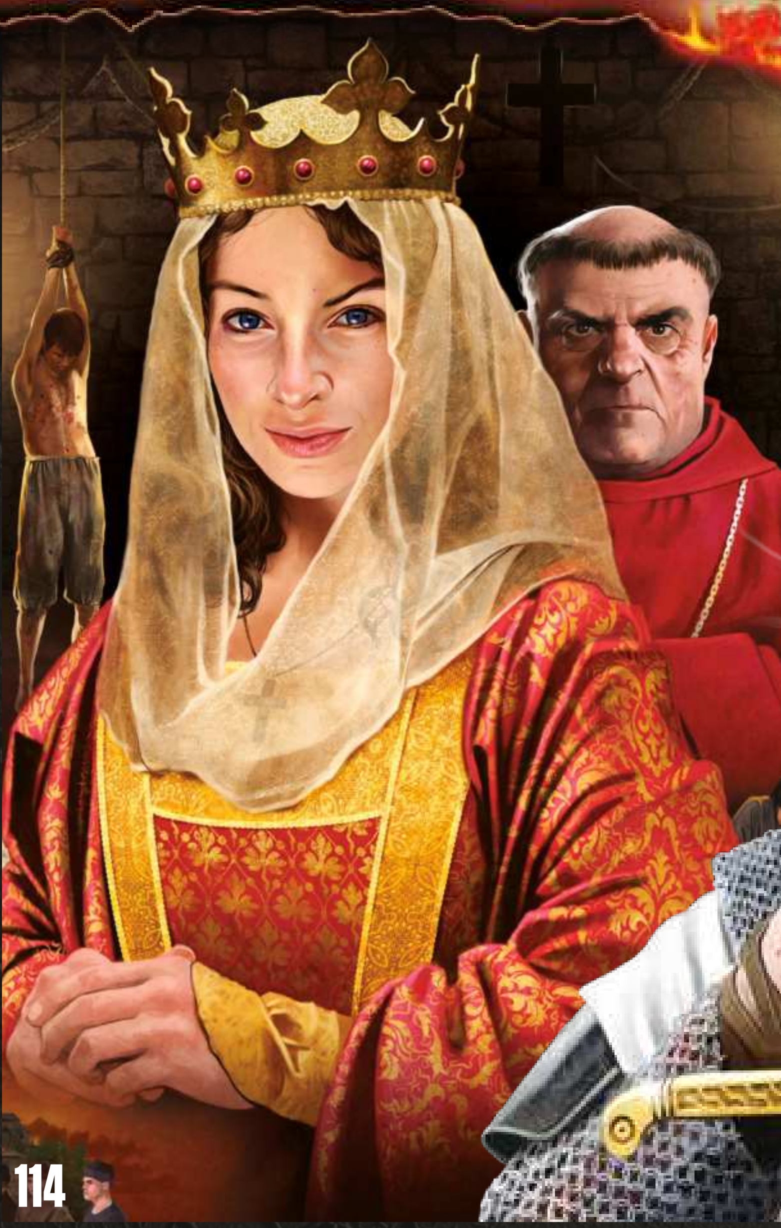

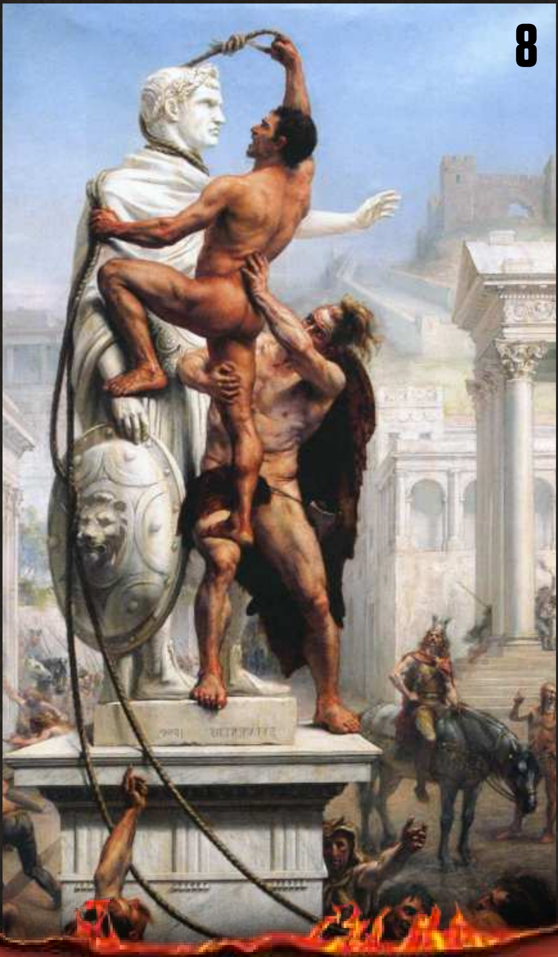

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An age of darkness and light

The Medieval era was a turning point in human history where, after the fall of Rome, Western civilisation had to readjust and move forward

The Medieval period straddles the middle of the three accepted divisions of Western history between classical antiquity and the modern age. It is itself typically divided into three sections, with the Early period running from roughly 500-1000, the High period stretching from 1000-1300, and coming to a close in the Late period from around 1300-1500. After the year 1500, the world enters the Early Modern period and the age of discovery. These dates are not set in stone, rather they are there for convenience.

The end of classical antiquity saw upheaval in Europe with mass migrations, and the Early Medieval period is often seen as a chaotic and lawless time in which barbarian rulers carved out territories in the death throes of the Roman Empire. Much of what we recognise as Europe today was started in the Medieval period, with nations such as Spain, England and France coming into being, and the provinces and city states of Germany and Italy growing in power.

> Contrary to popular belief, people in the Middle Ages did not think the earth was flat; this view was a Victorian invention

It was an age of religious learning and strife, of scientific advancement and repression. The arts and literature flourished in the lead up to the Renaissance. Warfare too changed with the arrival of gunpowder, and change in the fundamental make-up of armed forces saw combat evolve, but still remain as bloody as before. The Medieval period has a romance associated with chivalric and dashing knights roaming the land while kings ruled from castles up on high. The reality was quite different with plagues, famines and wars ravishing the landscape and claiming millions of lives. There was a silver lining to this calamity in the literary, scientific and cultural contributions that still reverberate in the world today. Much of the knowledge we hold as integral today had its origins in the discoveries and travels of great figures of the Middle Ages such as Thomas Aquinas, Al-Ghazali and Marco Polo.

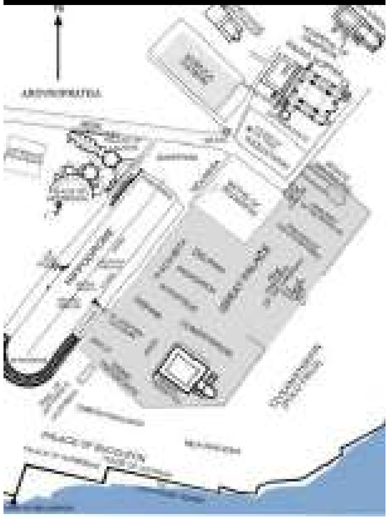
An age of darkness and light

The path from antiquity to modernity

The Nika riots

532

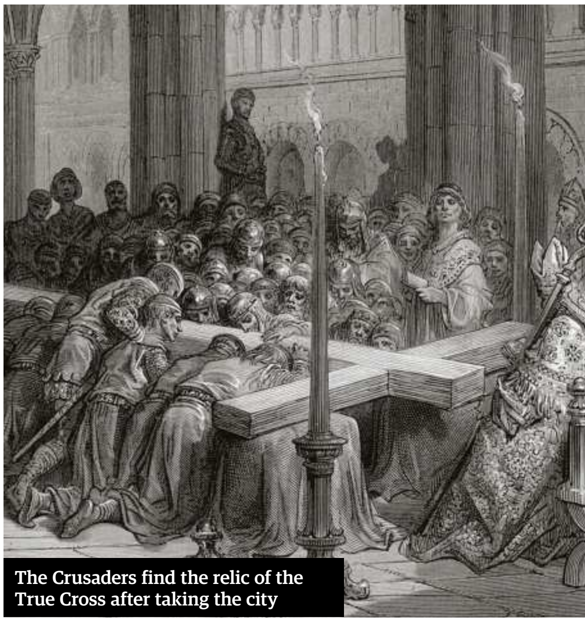
During a chariot race in Constantinople, a riot broke out between the two rival teams, the Greens and the Blues. Partly fuelled by political grievances, the mob decried the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora and proclaimed a new emperor in his place. After hearing of her husband's decision to flee, Theodora reportedly scolded him by saying, "Royal purple is the noblest shroud". Suitably embarrassed, Justinian ordered the riots be quelled and up to 30,000 people were killed in the ensuing violence. Justinian kept his throne and went on to recapture much of Italy and grow the power of the Eastern Roman Empire.


This map shows the Hippodrome where the riots took place and the palace where Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora would have taken refuge

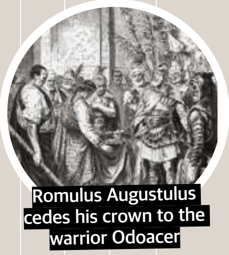
Siege of Jerusalem

1187

After the defeat of the Crusader army at Hattin, the forces of Saladin laid siege to the holy city of Jerusalem. Defended by Balian of Ibelin, he decided to surrender the city to spare the lives of its inhabitants. In contrast to the Crusaders' behaviour some years before, Saladin let the Christian population go if they paid a ransom. Any that couldn't do so were sold into slavery. The fall of the city shocked Europe, and two years later, the Third Crusade was called.


The Crusaders find the relic of the True Cross after taking the city

Odoacer deposes the last emperor
Often seen as the end of the Western Roman Empire, Odoacer becomes King of Italy when he overthrows the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus. **476**


Romulus Augustulus cedes his crown to the warrior Odoacer

Plague of Justinian
As the pandemic spreads, Millions of people around the Mediterranean basin are killed and Constantinople's population is almost halved. **541-542**

Death of Muhammad
The prophet of the Muslim faith dies and is buried in his wife Asha's house. **632**

Lindisfarne monastery was the victim of a Viking attack

Battle of Poitiers
A Frankish army checks Moorish aggression in Europe. Once thought to be one of the pivotal battles in Early Medieval history, its significance has since come under scrutiny. **732**

Reign of Charlemagne
Under his rule, northern Europe enjoys the Carolingian Renaissance. **768-814**

Early Viking raid
Norsemen attack the Isle of Lindisfarne and sack the monastery there. This marks the beginning of the Viking Age. **793**

Alfred the Great emerges
Under Alfred's rule, Wessex defeats the Viking invaders with its royal court becoming a haven for scholars. **871-899**

Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte
A treaty between the Franks and Normans leads to permanent settlement in Northern France, leading to the creation of the Duchy of Normandy. **911**

DOMI NVS ILLV
MINA TIO MEA
Oxford University is one of the oldest English speaking universities in the world

The Battle of Hastings
William the Conqueror defeats Harold Godwinson on the field of battle and claims the English throne, displacing much of the native aristocracy. **1066**

Take the Cross
The First Crusade is called by Pope Urban II to help liberate the Holy Land. It ends with the capture of Jerusalem and the creation of the Crusader Kingdoms. **1096-99**

Oxford University founded
One of the world's premier centres of learning opens its doors as English students are banned from studying in Paris. **1167**

Third Crusade
Richard the Lionheart and Saladin clash on the scorching sands of the Middle East. The Crusader objective, Jerusalem, remains in Muslim hands. **1189-92**

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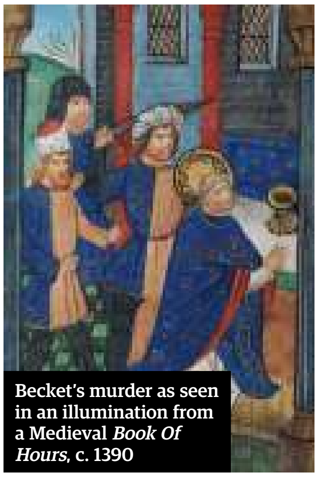
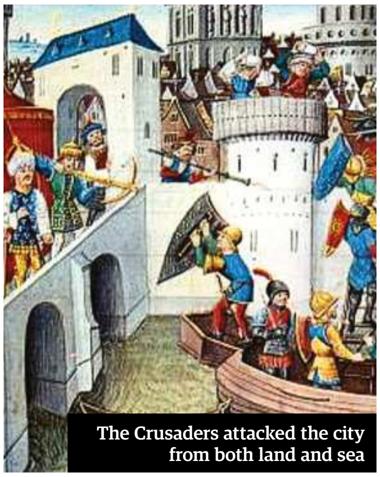

Becket's murder as seen in an illumination from a Medieval *Book Of Hours*, c. 1390

Death of Thomas Becket

1170

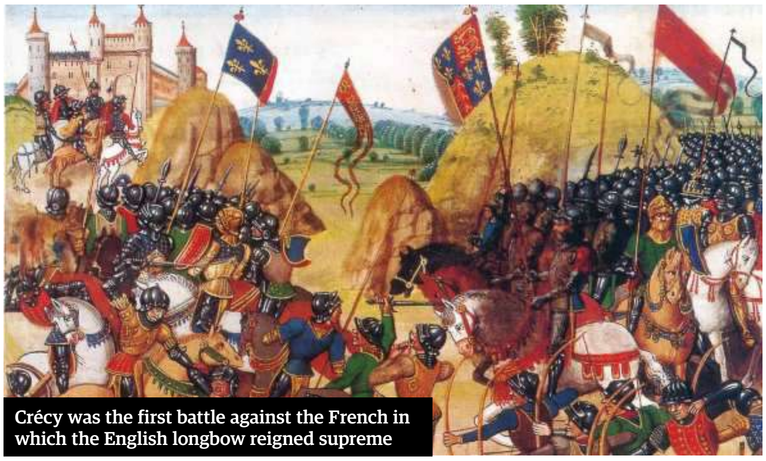
Thomas Becket was the archbishop of Canterbury, and in 1170, knights loyal to Henry II murdered him at Canterbury Cathedral. Previously Becket had excommunicated some of Henry's bishops, of which, it is popularly remembered, Henry uttered the words, "Who will rid me of this troublesome priest?" Taking this as a desire to see Becket dead, his men slew the Bishop. This outrageous act caused uproar and tainted Henry for the rest of his reign.


The Crusaders attacked the city from both land and sea

The Fourth Crusade

1202-04

After the Third Crusade failed to capture Jerusalem, Pope Innocent III called for another attempt, this time to attack through Egypt. En route, the Crusader force diverted to Constantinople to restore the deposed king, Isaac II Angelos, to the throne in return for support. After successfully crowning the king, he was again removed in a popular uprising and killed. With all promises of support evaporating, the Crusaders brutally sacked the city. This act hastened the decline of the Eastern Roman Empire and widened the split between the Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East.



Crécy was the first battle against the French in which the English longbow reigned supreme

Battle of Crécy

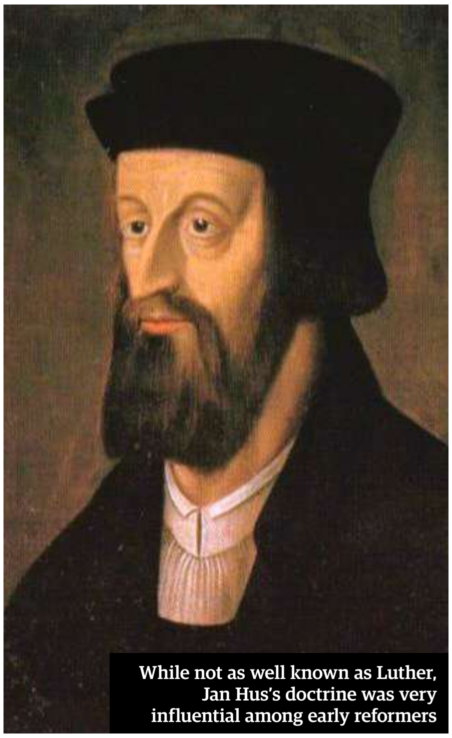
1346

Fought during the Edwardian phase of the Hundred Years' War, the battle was a decisive win for the English. Before the longbow's supremacy at Agincourt almost 70 years later, the weapon would play an equally important role in this battle, and when combined with some early cannon, saw the French destroyed. A particularly memorable event from the battle was the death of John of Bohemia. Having been blind for a decade before the fight, the king had his horse attached to those of his bodyguard, and he rode into battle, and to his death.

The burning of Jan Hus

1415

Jan Hus is considered to be one of the first church reformers, as he lived before other prominent reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin. For preaching a predecessor to Protestant doctrine that went against the Catholic teachings of the Eucharist, Hus was burned at the stake for heresy. Five years after his death, the followers of Hus's teachings, who were known as Hussites, would hold off the combined forces of Christendom over 11 years and five papal Crusades in what was known as the Hussite Wars. Despite Rome's best efforts, many people in the Czech lands followed Jan Hus's teachings many years after his death.



While not as well known as Luther, Jan Hus's doctrine was very influential among early reformers

Magna Carta
The 'Great Charter' is drafted to gain peace between the English King John and his rebellious barons. It limits the king's royal authority over his subjects. **1215**

The Mongol horde
The Mongols stream into the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Only the death of Genghis Khan saves these peoples from slaughter. **1237-42**

Genghis Khan's death arguably saved the West from destruction

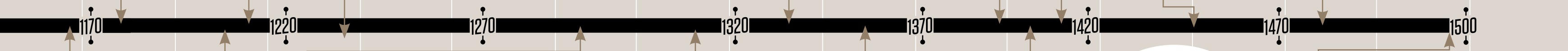
Hundred Years' War begins
Fought for more than 100 years, this conflict would see five generations of English and French kings duke it out for the French throne. **1337**

Peasants' Revolt
Wat Tyler leads an army of rebels to force concessions from King Richard II of England. The revolt is suppressed and it's leaders executed. **1381**

Battle of Agincourt
Although outnumbered, Henry V of England utilises the fearsome longbow and destroys a much larger French army. **1415**

Constantinople falls
Mehmed II breaches the walls of Constantinople and brings the Eastern Roman Empire to an end. **1453**

The Spanish Inquisition
Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand set up the Spanish Inquisition, but it is not as bloodthirsty as other religious tribunals in Europe. **1478**



Albigensian Crusade
The Cathars, a heretical sect of Christianity, are hunted down and slaughtered in Carcassonne and southern France. **1209-29**

Ottoman Empire founded
Osman I founds the Ottoman dynasty in Anatolia and lends his name to it. **1299**

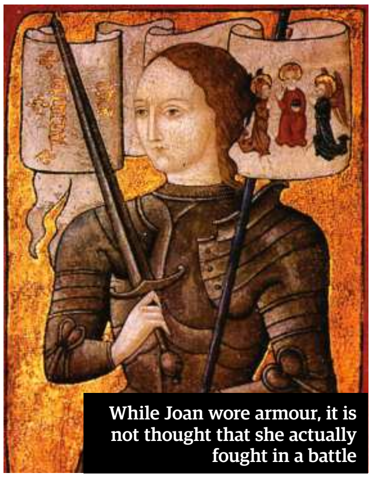
Battle of Bannockburn
King Robert the Bruce leads a Scottish army to victory against the English. The Declaration of Arbroath secures Scottish independence in 1320. **1314**

The Black Death
This pandemic will kill millions of people, wiping out a significant chunk of the world's population. **1347**

Battle of Nicopolis
During the Crusade of Nicopolis, the Ottomans rout an allied force of European states. **1396**

An anachronistic image of the Battle of Nicopolis

Portugal finds trade route to India
Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer, circumnavigates the African continent and discovers a sea route to India. **1497-98**

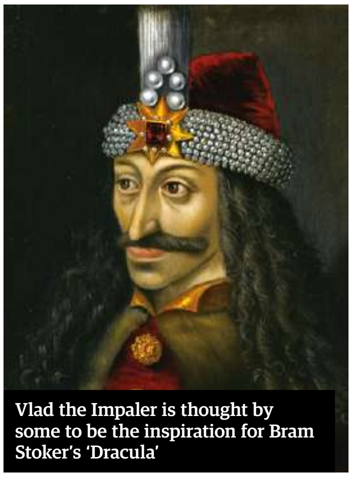


While Joan wore armour, it is not thought that she actually fought in a battle

Joan of Arc

c. 1412-31

Born a peasant girl, Joan of Arc would go on to inspire the French army to victory in its moment of defeat during the Hundred Years' War. Claiming to have had visions from God and his angels, Joan was certain of French victory over the English and supported the as-yet-uncrowned king of France, Charles VII. After she joined the army, the French won a decisive victory at Orleans. Wherever she went, the spirits of the French were lifted until, after being captured and handed to the English, she was burned at the stake aged just 19.

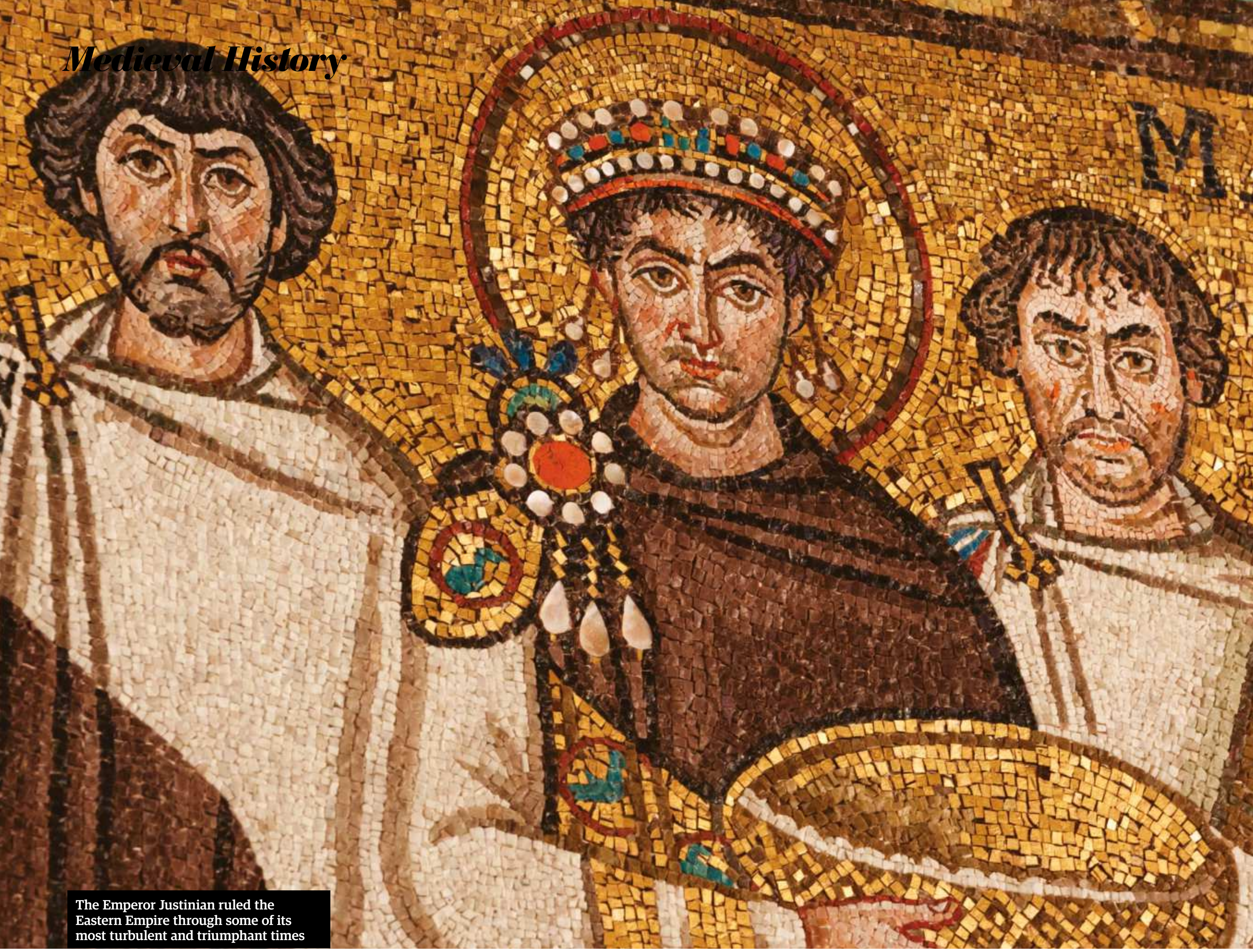


Vlad the Impaler is thought by some to be the inspiration for Bram Stoker's 'Dracula'

Ottoman forces invade Wallachia

1462

After Vlad the Impaler snubbed Mehmed II by refusing to pay tribute, Ottoman forces entered the Kingdom of Wallachia (modern-day Romania). Outnumbered and outgunned, Vlad retreated into this own kingdom employing a scorched-earth policy to deny any supplies to the Ottomans. With his savagery knowing no bounds, Vlad impaled 20,000 people in a grotesque display. Upon seeing this, the Ottoman army decided against further pursuit and returned home.



The Emperor Justinian ruled the Eastern Empire through some of its most turbulent and triumphant times

Early Medieval period

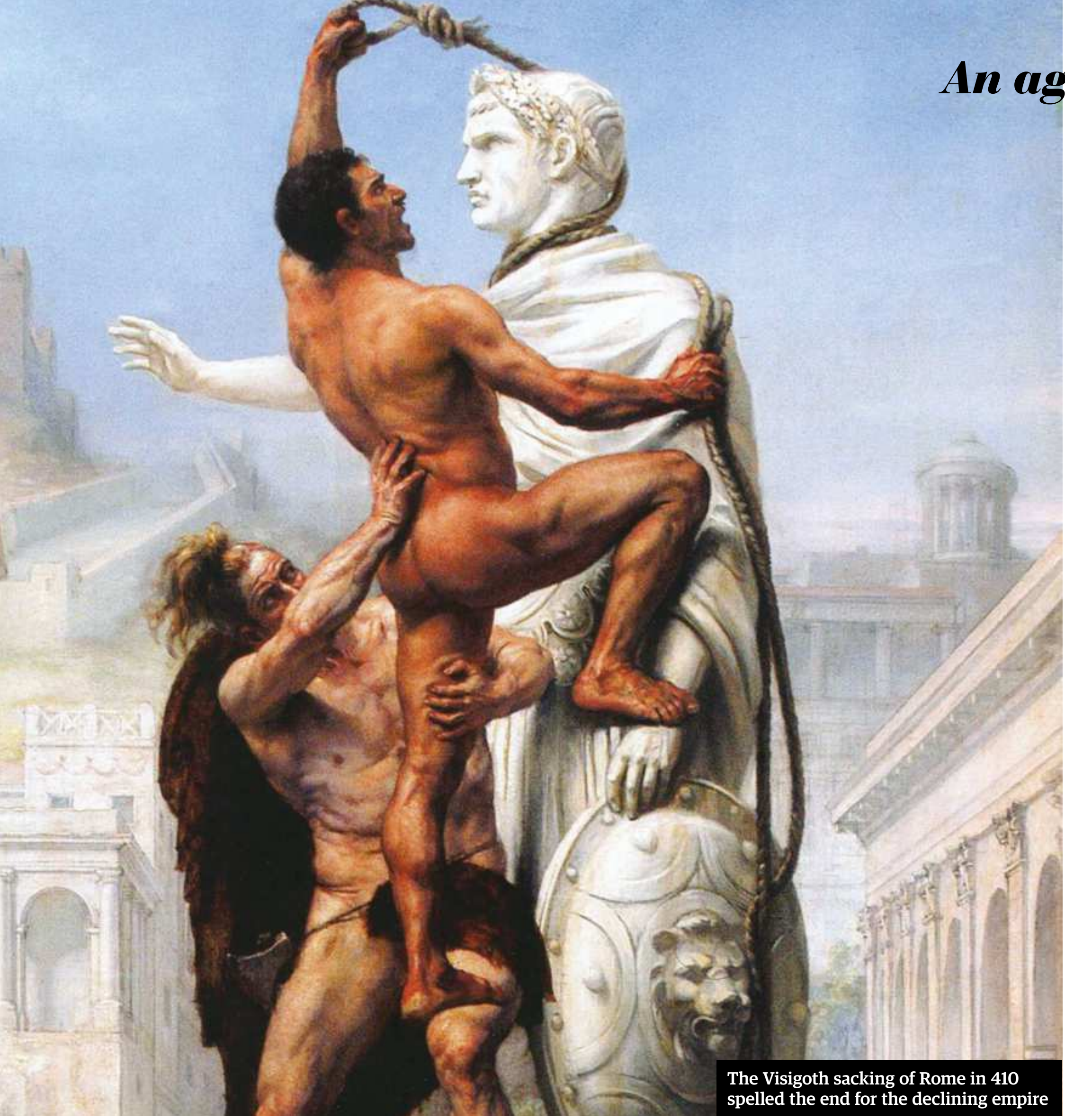
476 – c. 1000

After the decline of Rome, the borders of Europe began to reshape as tribes of wandering 'barbarians' picked over the carcass of a fallen empire

The end of classical antiquity, and so the beginning of the Medieval period, coincides with the fall of the western half of the Roman Empire, traditionally dated to 476. In this year, a man named Odoacer became king of Italy when he deposed the last emperor Romulus Augustulus. While the decline and fall of the empire is still disputed, this date serves as a signpost in history from where the next chapter can be written. With the breakup of centralised power, the kingdoms of Medieval Europe began to take shape. With the Anglo-Saxon invasion of England and the Frankish and Gothic kingdoms in France and Spain being established, Europe's borders began to change. The idea of nationalism we know today would not have existed at this point in time, with each modern geographical country being split into a number of warring kingdoms and states.

The Eastern Roman Empire had managed to weather the storm and emerge relatively unscathed by the collapse of its neighbour. Its capital of Constantinople, as well as being the centre of the Greek Orthodox Church, would become a beacon of learning and innovation, and rulers such as Justinian would seek to rekindle the dying spark of Rome. This dream was hampered by a pandemic known as the Plague of Justinian. A strain of bubonic plague ravaged Constantinople, the Sassanid Empire (the last Iranian empire before the rise of Islam) and many cities around the Mediterranean. Anywhere between 25 to 50 million people were lost to the disease, which would have amounted to about 13 per cent of the world's population at the time.

The West had managed to avoid the worst of the plague for now but was a hotbed of conflict between many different factions. Out of the Frankish kingdom came a man named Charlemagne, who busied himself bringing the disparate kingdoms of northern Europe into the Christian fold. In the 9th century, about 300 years after Rome's fall, the Carolingian Empire, with Charlemagne crowned as the emperor of Rome, would relive its glory days. Through conquest, religious conversion and social reforms, northern Europe entered into what is known as the Carolingian Renaissance. Although the empire would not outlast him, Charlemagne laid the



The Visigoth sacking of Rome in 410 spelled the end for the declining empire

foundations for France and Germany to grow powerful during the Middle Ages.

As the sun set on the Carolingian Empire, another period of strife in Europe was about to begin: the Viking Age. Vikings were raiders who came from the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark, seeking trade and plunder. After the notorious Lindisfarne raid in 793, these warbands blazed a trail through Europe, raiding and establishing colonies from Ireland all the way down the Bosphorus to Russia. These intrepid explorers even made it to North America, centuries before Christopher Columbus made his fateful voyage. With their long ships being equally at home in rivers as in the sea, the Norsemen could at first raid and conquer with startling ease, bringing the Anglo-Saxon and Frankish kingdoms to their knees. Figures like Alfred the Great would rise to meet these invaders and lay the foundations of a united England as he subdued the invaders.

As Europe struggled with these problems, a new and powerful force was rising in the Middle East and Africa: the Islamic caliphates. The Persian Empire and its successors had held power in Iran and the Middle East for centuries but had become weakened by constant warfare with the Eastern Roman Empire. Seizing on this weakened state, the Umayyad Caliphate, led by Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan, overran the Persians and held power from 661 to 750. At the height of its power, the Caliphate stretched from Spain, across North Africa to Egypt, the Middle East and Iran. This great gain in territory is often seen as part of the Arab Golden Age. From the 710s onwards, Christians who embarked on the Reconquista would challenge Moorish supremacy in Spain. This sparked a bitter struggle for the Iberian Peninsula that would take almost 800 years to resolve.

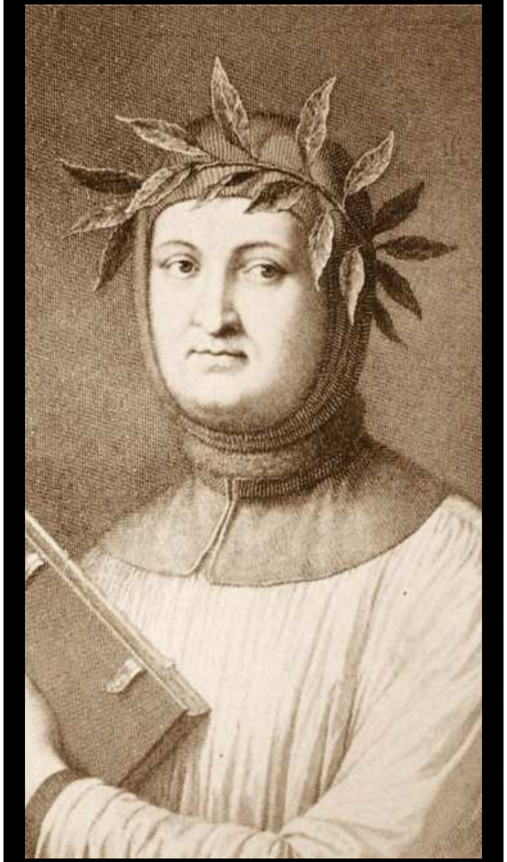
While these great deeds were being carried out, life for the average person would have been one of agriculture. The decline of urban centres would lend itself to the rise of systemic agriculture and a social system traditionally called feudalism. The basis of this system was that a ruler or ruling class would accept service from the serfs in the field in return for providing their protection. Unlike previous systems, such as the Roman Empire, where loyalty was given to a centralised figure, this new system relied on personal allegiances between vassal and lord. These relationships would come to shape the very fabric of Medieval rulership during this period.

> Animals were smaller in the Medieval period than they are today, with cows and sheep being about a third of the size

The 'Dark Ages'

The Early Medieval period is viewed as a barbaric time in history, but was it all doom and gloom?

The term 'Dark Ages' is loaded with both good and bad connotations. It originates from the idea that after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, as centralised power started to crumble, many provinces such as Britain and Gaul were left without civilisation and technology. Written records and cultural artefacts are thin on the ground for this period, hence the 'dark' connotations, as we simply do not have as much evidence as other periods of history. Stories of societies forgetting how to make nails, lawlessness, and anarchy and near-constant warfare fuel the theory that living in this time would have meant a hard and brutal life. Historians are constantly arguing over this label, as it might not be a fair assessment. The Islamic world at this time was experiencing something of a golden age, with many breakthroughs being made in science, mathematics and architecture. Glittering mosques and religious and scientific manuscripts were produced with a reconnection to the writing of classical authors. While there is still disagreement on the exact meaning of the phrase, it has become ingrained in popular thought as the standard label for the Early Medieval period. The fact that it is 'dark' could point to the scarcity of written sources in this period, rather than a period of bloodshed and anarchy. While warfare still played a major part in politics of the day, violence has defined periods both before and after the dark ages, and is not specific to these times.



Italian scholar and poet Petrarch is the man who conceived the idea of a European 'dark age'

High Medieval period

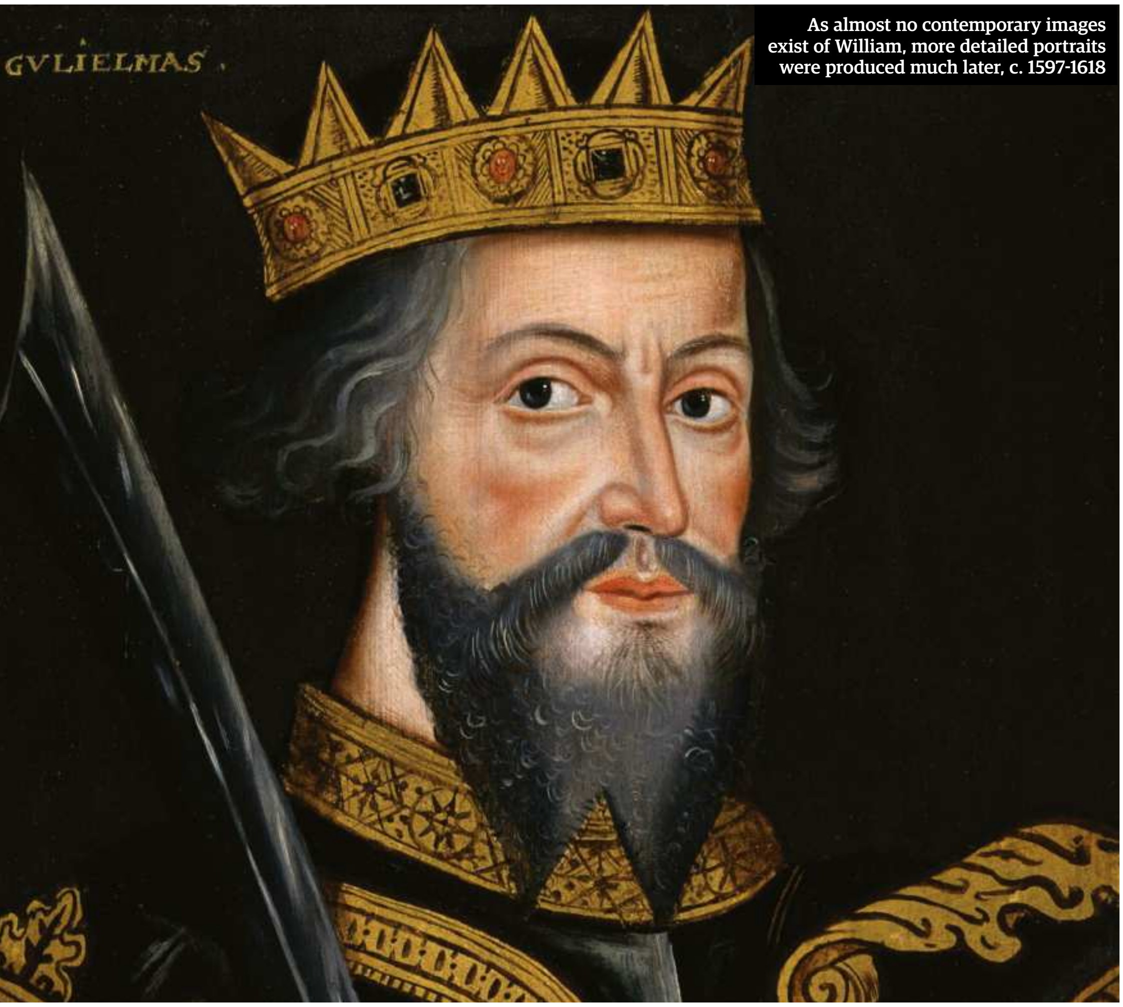
c. 1000 – c. 1300

While the brutal nature of the Early Medieval period was still present, cultural innovations began to look familiar

The High Medieval period is perhaps the most iconic in people's minds. It is this age in which we see the rise of the knight and the chivalric code. We see the building of great stone castles and churches in Europe and the Middle East, and Christian and Islamic armies clash in the Crusades.

On the northern coast of France, Duke William of Normandy prepared for his invasion of England. Acting on his claim to the throne and with the backing of the pope, William landed in southern England and beat the rival claimant, Harold Godwinson, in the Battle of Hastings. Many of William's followers were not just fighting for loyalty, rather lending their military service in the hopes of being awarded land in the newly conquered kingdom. After Hastings, the Anglo-Saxon elite was muscled out and a new French-speaking Norman aristocracy introduced to Britain. This shake-up of the upper echelons of society would pave the way for many generations of British royalty and nobility. Meanwhile, when Islamic forces captured the city of Jerusalem, Pope Urban II issued a call to arms in 1095 across Christendom. The First Crusade had been called to bring the Holy Land back under Christian control and establish the Latin kingdoms in the Middle East. There would be as many as nine crusades throughout the following centuries for both Jerusalem and other cities in the Eastern Mediterranean. These conflicts saw the rise of knightly orders such as the Knights Templar and Hospitaller. Created to protect pilgrim caravans from raids, these orders of knights became the shock troops of the Christian realms and were highly respected for their martial prowess.

While these two religions clashed, a new threat was emerging from the eastern Steppes. Under the leadership of Genghis Khan, the Mongol hordes descended upon the world. After overrunning vast swathes of China, the Mongol war machine turned its hungry eyes to the western horizon. Attacking the Middle East and eastern Europe, the Mongols smashed any army sent against them. These people were only saved by the death of the great Khan, which caused the invading armies to return to Mongolia to elect a new leader. While the east would feel the ravages of Genghis's decedents, the Mongols would never again venture further west. As well as bringing death and destruction, the Mongols also bought technological improvements with them, having been documented using the first gunpowder weapons in Europe. They had captured these 'fire sticks', as they were called, from the Chinese, who had developed gunpowder weapons in the Early period.



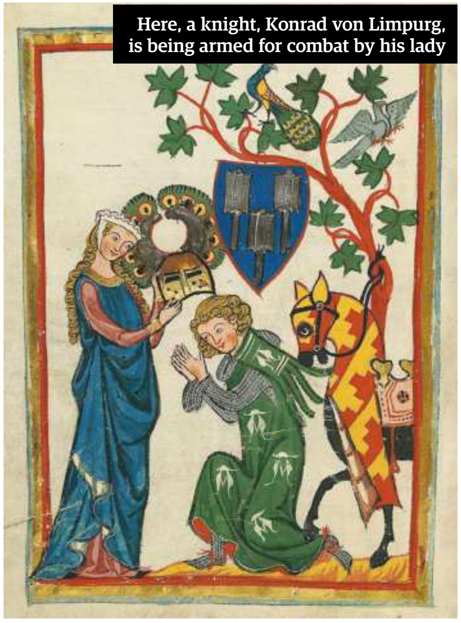
As almost no contemporary images exist of William, more detailed portraits were produced much later, c. 1597-1618

Shaking off the stigma of the so-called 'dark ages', Europe and the wider world could now unequivocally look forward in both scientific and religious study. The rediscovery of classical thinkers like Aristotle inspired scholars like Thomas Aquinas to combine theological and philosophical principles to create a mix of faith and reason. Along with intellectual progress, architecture also made leaps forward, with Gothic style coming to the fore. With iconic facades and magnificent vaulted ceilings, many churches and cathedrals, such as Reims Cathedral in France and Westminster Abbey in London, were built and are now listed as UNESCO World Heritage sites. This style became so popular that it even experienced a revival in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Not all developments in the High Medieval period were man-made, however. From around 950 to 1250, Europe and other parts of the world, including China, experienced an extended period of warmer weather. Aside from being able to grow grapes in southern England, historians believe that the colonisation of Greenland and possibly North America by the Norse was made possible by the lack of ice that would have otherwise have blocked their ships. As the temperatures dropped again, however, these places became more inhospitable, with the last written record of Norse Greenlanders coming in 1408.

While the Norse were heading west, a Venetian trader named Marco Polo had set off east. Travelling what is known as the Silk Road, Marco is hailed as the man who introduced the majority of Europeans to the far east of central Asia and China. Travelling in 1260, Polo visited the court of Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis, who ruled China at this time. Aside from exciting stories, Marco Polo was able to influence European cartography that would aid the exploration of the East for the next 100 years. While Polo was not the first European to visit the Orient, he was the first to chronicle his experiences in detail, which led to his fame.

Medieval castles had spiral staircases that went upwards in a clockwise direction, aiding right-handed defenders

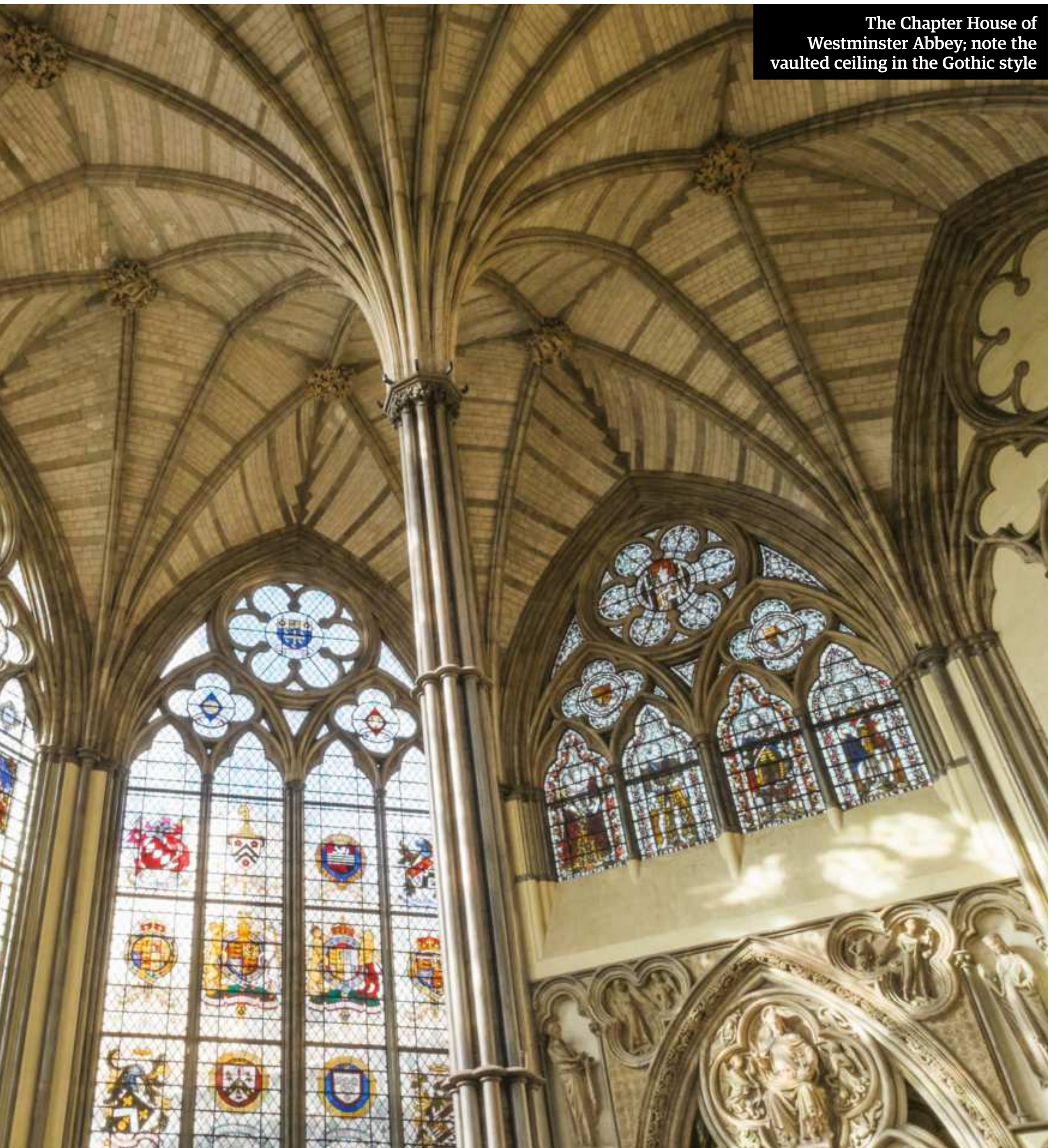

Here, a knight, Konrad von Limpurg, is being armed for combat by his lady

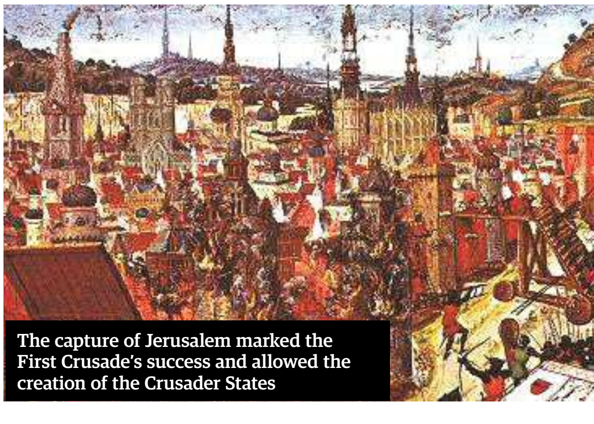
The rise of the chivalric code

The idea of chivalry, a warrior and moral code by which knights lived, is one that has evolved throughout the ages. Now we are more familiar with chivalry being focused towards women, with a chivalrous man playing the part of warden and protector. While this idea is thought to be somewhat outdated, it is simply an evolution of the concept that grew out of the Crusades. Before Eleanor of Aquitaine would champion these ideas, knights in Europe were steeped in a militaristic tradition of combat and violence. With the introduction of the chivalric code, or Code du Chevalier, these men were expected to hold themselves to higher expectations and a code of conduct. This included mercy to lower social classes, most likely peasants, treatment of wealthy enemies that befitted their station, fairness and clemency on the battlefield and respectful conduct towards highborn women.

Chivalry became intrinsically linked with Arthurian romance, where tales of gallant knights saving heroines and slaying beasts captured the imagination of the European Medieval courts. Court etiquette was drastically changed by this ethos, with courtly love becoming a flurry of chaste romance amid pageantry and games. Tournaments of martial prowess such as jousting and melee combat became one of the favourite pastimes in Europe, with knights travelling across the continent to display their strength and possibly win the favour of a lady of the court.

Chivalry would outlive the Middle Ages as a series of cultural traditions that continued long after heavily armoured knights fell out of favour on the battlefield.


The Chapter House of Westminster Abbey; note the vaulted ceiling in the Gothic style


The capture of Jerusalem marked the First Crusade's success and allowed the creation of the Crusader States

Famous faces through time

Discover some of the most influential figures of the Middle Ages

Early Medieval period

Charlemagne

c. 740s-28 January 814

Called 'The Father of Europe', Charlemagne, or Charles the Great, ruled over much of Western Europe, which was known as the Carolingian Empire. Spending much of his early life on campaign, he enjoyed success in subduing other European kingdoms and converting them to Christianity, notably the Saxons and the Lombards. From 778-800, he led an incursion into Muslim Spain and aided Pope Leo III when a rebellion threatened to oust the pontiff from power. In recognition of his help to save Christendom, the pope crowned Charlemagne emperor of the Romans, a title that would solidify his reputation as the most powerful Christian ruler in Europe. After his death, his empire fractured from incessant fighting.

High Medieval period

Eleanor of Aquitaine

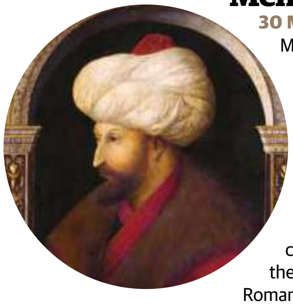
c. 1122-1204

Possessing a fiery spirit to equal any other ruler of the period, Eleanor was one of the richest and most powerful women in Western Europe. When she inherited the Duchy of Aquitaine from her father, she found herself the most desirable women in Christendom. Rather than let herself be controlled by others Eleanor was more than a match for her suitors, getting married first to King Louis VII of France and later Henry II of England. Among her exploits were travelling on the Second Crusade and aiding her sons in rebellion against their father, Henry II. Always active in politics and conflicts, she lived into her 80s and outlived all but one of her sons.

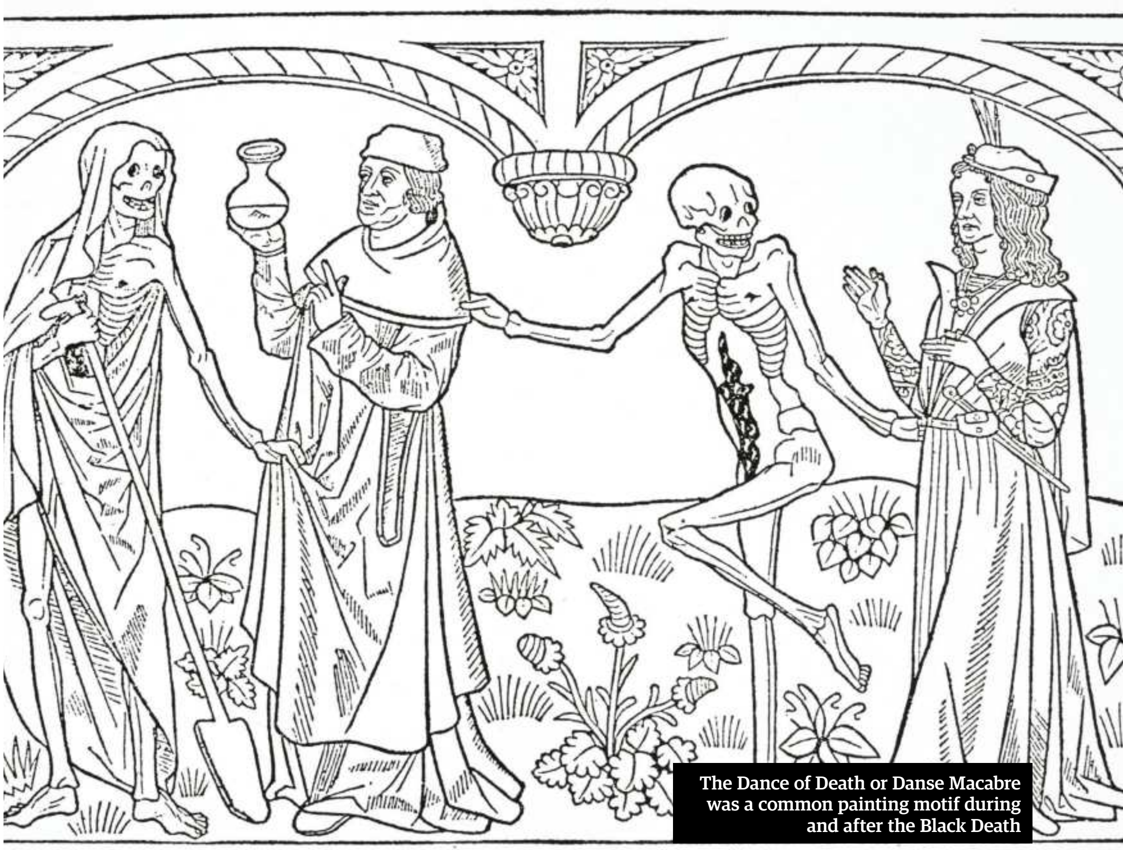
Late Medieval period

Mehmed II

30 March 1432-3 May 1481



Mehmed II is one of the most famous Sultans, and a hero in Turkey and to other nations in the Muslim world. He has been styled 'the conqueror', and carries the name for good reason. Under his rule, the Ottoman Empire captured Constantinople, the jewel of the Eastern Roman Empire, and made massive gains in Southern and Eastern Europe, locking horns with the likes of Vlad the Impaler. His was a court of scholarship and learning, with many artists, theologians and thinkers gathering together. The strength of his character is evident, as even after his passing, the Ottoman Empire's cultural and geographical borders remained strong and far-reaching for many years.



The Dance of Death or Danse Macabre was a common painting motif during and after the Black Death

Late Medieval period

c. 1300 – c. 1500

Although fraught with pandemics and religious schisms, Europe in the Late Medieval period would become a beacon of culture during the Renaissance

Perhaps more than the Early and High periods, the Late Medieval period experienced the worst disasters and dizzying highs. In the 14th and 15th centuries, a series of events that have come to be known as the crisis of the Late Middle Ages occurred. Aside from conflicts like the Peasants' Revolt, Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses, natural disasters like the Black Plague and Great Famine ravished much of Europe, effectively halting advancement in places like England for many years.

The warm period that Europe had been enjoying was coming to an end in the Late Medieval period, giving way to what is known as the Little Ice Age. This drop in temperature had an adverse affect on crops, causing the Great Famine of 1315-17, but this was a small incident when compared to what was to come after.

As the world was thinking it had recovered from the devastation of the Plague of Justinian, a greater mortal disease, known as the Black Death, descended on Europe. From 1346-53, the pandemic ravaged much of the East and Europe. Beginning on the arid plains of Asia, the disease quickly spread along the Silk Road to Crimea, where it was then spread to Europe in a matter of years. Disagreement is still rife about precisely how the bacteria was transported, whether it came on infected fleas travelling on rats or was an airborne contaminate spread through coughs and sneezes. What is known undoubtedly, however, is that the death toll was catastrophic, with the highest estimate placing the number of dead at 200 million. Whole populations were almost wiped out, with cities like London, Florence and Siena losing up to 60 per cent of

> It was not uncommon for animals to be put on trial, with the earliest record being the execution of a pig in 1266

their populations. The economic damage that followed also destabilised countries, as with a lack of workers, trade prices sky rocketed. Rulers sought to try to control these prices but ultimately failed, with rebellions like the Jacquerie in France and the Peasants' Revolt in England a direct result of this price tampering.

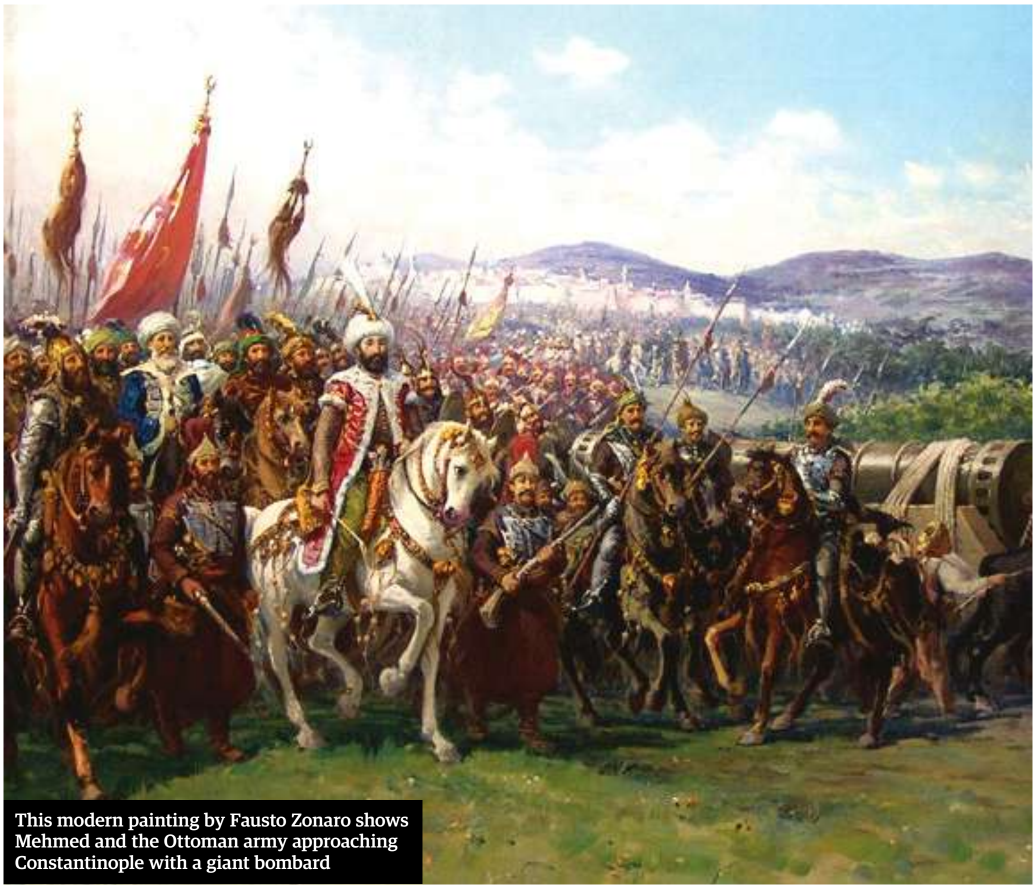
To add to the list of problems in Europe, the Reformation saw one of the binding materials of Western society, the Catholic Church, ripped apart. Disillusioned with increasing corruption in the church, Martin Luther, a German priest, started the split when he wrote his *Ninety-five Theses* in 1517. These were a list of grievances against the Church, attacking practices such as indulgences, where people could pay money to the church in exchange for less time in purgatory when they died. Influenced by the humanist teachings of the Renaissance that encouraged the challenging of the status quo, Protestant theology began to disagree with the Catholic theory of the Eucharist. The two denominations clashed on whether you actually ingested the blood and body of Christ or whether it was a notional, spiritual offering. In response to this challenge, the Catholic Church offered a counter reformation at the Council of Trent, intent on stopping the spread of Protestantism. This caused Europe to fracture down the middle, with most of northern Europe becoming Protestant while southern Europe remained Catholic.

The ever-raging battle between Christian and Muslim forces was also still ongoing in the Late Medieval period. The Ottoman Empire would rise to become a dominant power, effectively ending the Eastern Roman Empire with the capture of Constantinople in 1453 by Mehmed II and his fearsome artillery. As Christendom lost its hold on Anatolia, it gained a firm footing in Spain with the end of the Reconquista and the capture of Granada in 1492. With Isabella of Castile married to Ferdinand II of Aragon, the modern nation of Spain was born.

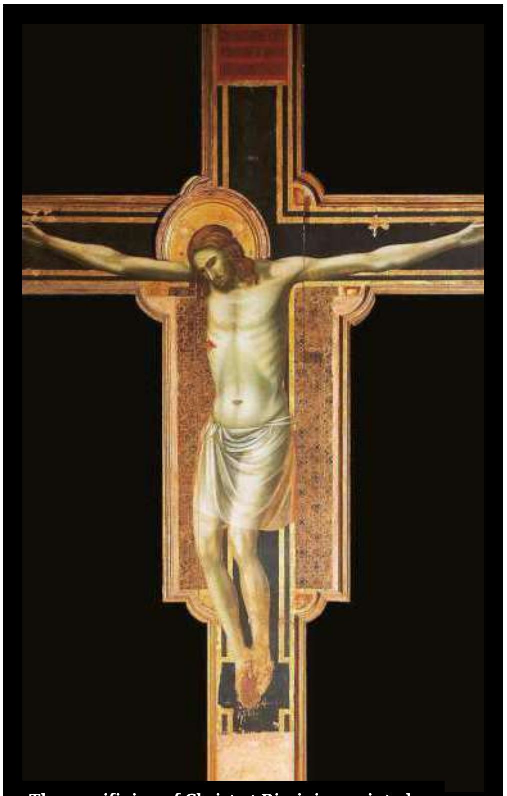
In the same year, Christopher Columbus set sail on the Santa Maria and reached the Bahamas in the New World. This discovery would pave the way for the age of discovery, and soon fierce rivalry would consume the major European powers as they sought to build empires.

As well as the New World, the increasing dominance of the Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Mediterranean encouraged the Christian nations of Europe to find alternate trade routes. Portuguese sailors would soon chart the coasts of Africa, discovering a sea route to India in 1498 that put them in direct competition with Spain.

The Late Medieval period saw populations ebb and flow. With increasing urbanisation, many European and Middle Eastern cities began to boast populations of more than 100,000, a sign that urban environments themselves were becoming centres of government and learning, rather than being based around an individual as had been the case in previous periods. The world in this period would look more recognisable to us today, as we begin to see the birth of modern nations such as Spain, Portugal, France and Great Britain.



This modern painting by Fausto Zonaro shows Mehmed and the Ottoman army approaching Constantinople with a giant bombard



The crucifixion of Christ at Rimini as painted by artist and architect Giotto di Bondone

Origins of the Renaissance

How did classical art and literature inspire a revival of European art?

While derived from the French word for 'rebirth', the Renaissance actually began in Italy. It was a period of great social and cultural upheaval while also revisiting and reinvigorating Europe's classical past.

The first murmurings of this movement can be found in the work of artists in 13th-century Florence. Literature, like Dante Alighieri's epic poem *Divine Comedy*, dealt more with human characteristics and behaviours, rather than a strictly religious outlook.

It was not just writers who contributed to this cultural awakening, with painters like Giotto, who painted a portrait of Dante, producing work in a style that was likened to "drawing accurately from life". This move towards greater accuracy and perspective in paintings was a drastic change from the more symbolic approach of earlier Medieval artists. Greater anatomical knowledge also helped this more realistic style to flourish, and this was helped greatly by the work of people like Leonardo da Vinci.

Philosophy had changed as well, mostly from the rediscovery of classical texts by authors like Aristotle. Humanism, a new philosophy, dealt with trying to find humanity's place in the universe. Rather than regard man as sinful, humanism sought to find reason and method in the world, again a far cry from some earlier Medieval thinking.

Like everyone else, artists need to be paid and patronage was heavily sought after in Italy in this period, which had grown extremely wealthy via trade links to the east. To add to its prospects as the new centre for European art, its individual city states nestled in the heartland of the old Roman Empire.

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WARS, INVASIONS & EXPLORATION

The Medieval period was filled with intrepid explorers, bloodthirsty tyrants and legendary warriors

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Heavily armoured knights fought with a fierce array of weaponry

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Becoming an elite cavalry warrior took more than a decade of training

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Meet the warrior king who faced off against Viking invaders

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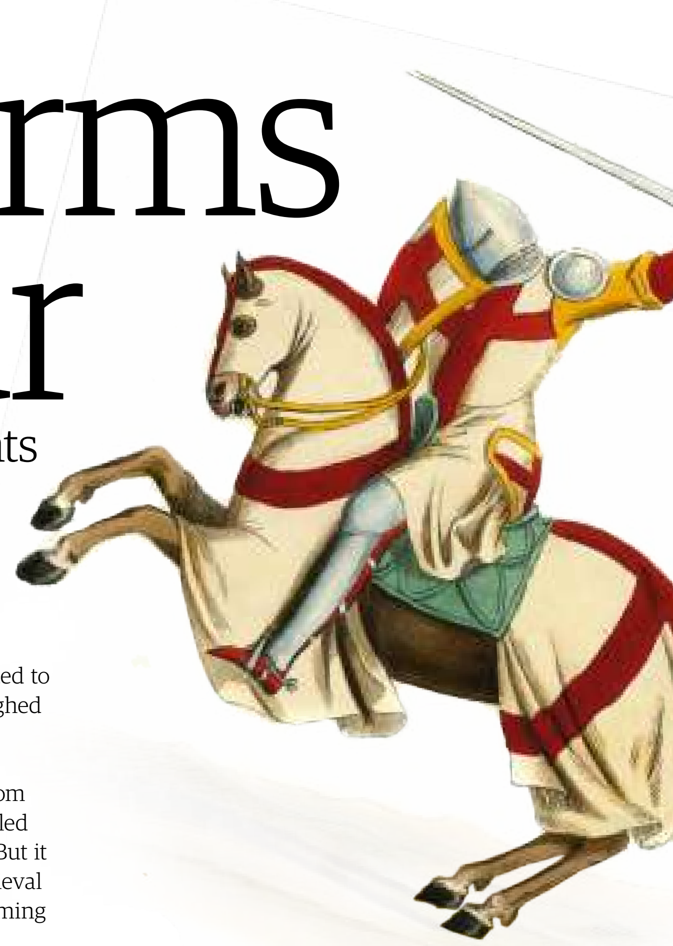
Medieval arms and armour



Heavily armoured and riding on horseback, knights were wealthy, respected and capable of delivering death with an array of devastating weapons

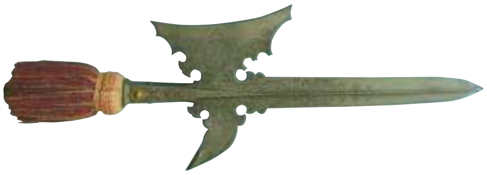
Life in Medieval times was rarely peaceful, and with many wars raging throughout the lengthy period, it was necessary to have a large group of robust fighters who could carry out campaigns and defend property, or their lords, when necessary.

At the top end of the scale were knights, who were employed at great expense by the noble classes. They fought terrifying battles on horseback in return for pieces of land – or a fief – from the rulers or lords employing their services in a model of government known as feudalism.

It ensured knights would be considered an honourable elite class of warrior with strong connections to nobility. But they were expected to subscribe to the code of chivalry, which sloughed off some of their rough edges.

Over time, the expense of the knights saw relatively untrained infantrymen recruited from the peasant classes, and eventually more skilled middle-class freemen also took up the fight. But it is the knights who tend to hallmark the Medieval period, with their weapons and armour becoming iconic as the centuries have passed.

Four fearsome weapons

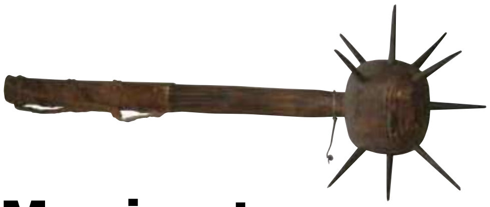


Halberds offered thrusting power

As the Swiss army knife of its time (and indeed it was popular with 14th and 15th-century Swiss armies), the halberd comprised a long, sharp wooden pike together with an axe blade and a hook used to prise riders from their horses. The shaft could be reinforced with metal.

Longbows provided rapid ranged attack

Favoured for their long-range ability, longbows were more than 1.8 metres in length and they were typically made from yew wood and a glue-soaked string of hemp. Archers could release up to a dozen arrows per minute, devastating the enemy, particularly in the Hundred Years' War.



Morning stars rudely awoke

Morning stars were fearsome weapons which bore similarities to the mace, only with the small knobs replaced by spikes or blades. Used by both the infantry and cavalry, they would be grasped by their wooden shaft and swung into the face or legs of the enemy.

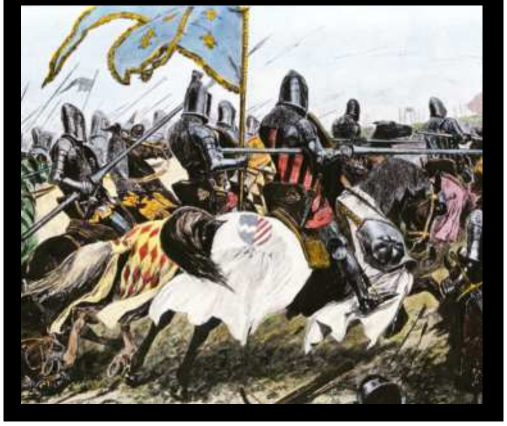
The arming sword was essential

Knights would rarely travel without their swords, making them among the most common Medieval weapons. Hugely symbolic and used in cut-and-thrust defence combat, they were straight, double-edged weapons with a blade of around 80 centimetres, typically used with a shield.

Here comes the cavalry

Medieval horsemen were well-trained, disciplined and professional soldiers whose expertise was important, especially in mounting a tightly formed shock charge. There were two main types of cavalry – light and heavy – with those that belonged to the former being lightly armed and expected to carry out lower-threat duties such as reconnaissance and skirmishing.

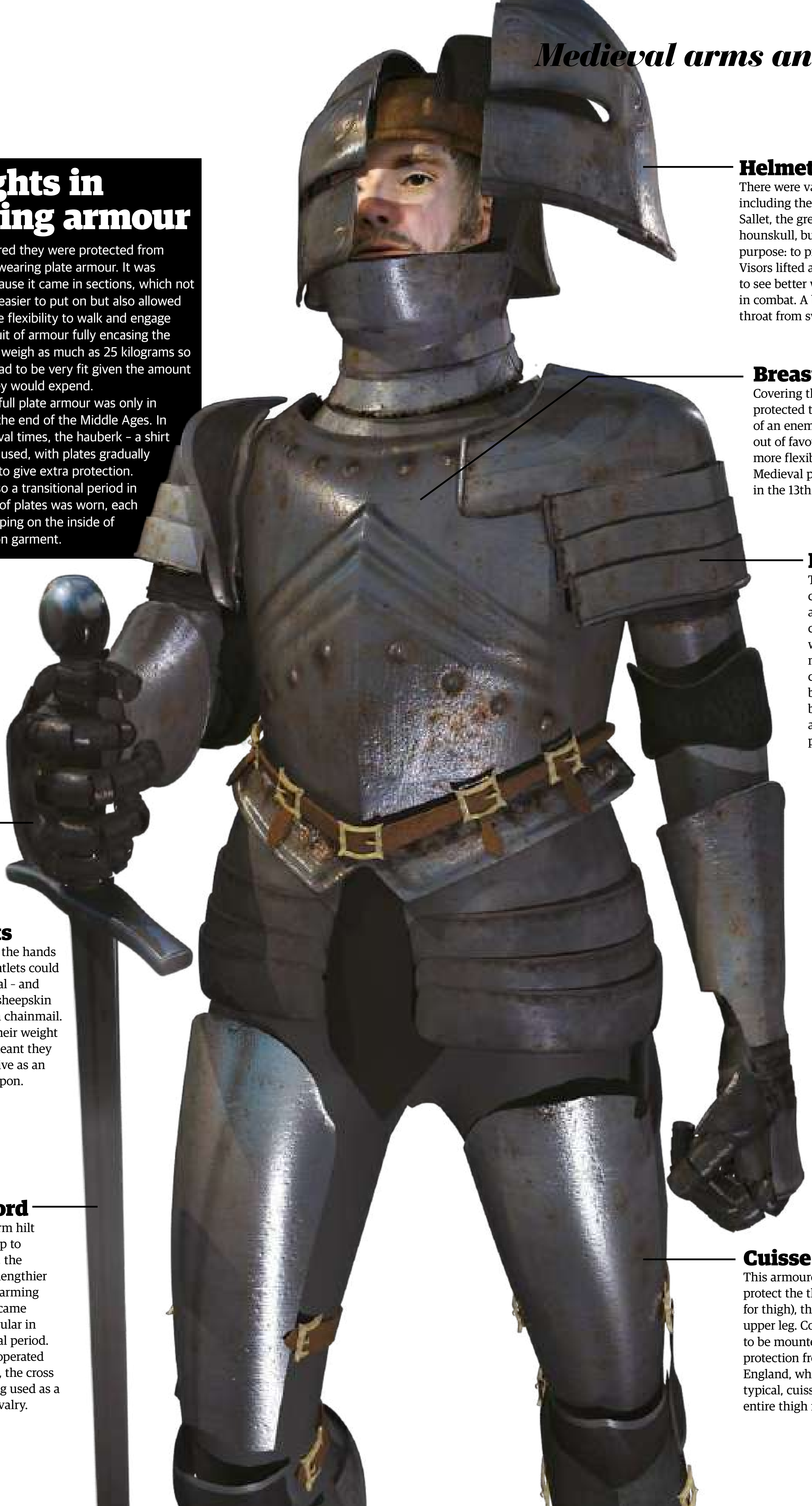
The heavy cavalry would consist of knights and would be well-armoured and carry the most dangerous of weapons. Their on-high position and mobile nature would allow them to inflict great damage on the enemy and they fought alongside the unmounted rank and file. As well as playing a decisive role and guarding castles, knights were also respected and they could be granted a portion of land as a reward.



Knights in shining armour

Knights ensured they were protected from attackers by wearing plate armour. It was so-called because it came in sections, which not only made it easier to put on but also allowed the knight the flexibility to walk and engage in battle. A suit of armour fully encasing the wearer could weigh as much as 25 kilograms so the knights had to be very fit given the amount of energy they would expend.

That said, full plate armour was only in use towards the end of the Middle Ages. In earlier Medieval times, the hauberk – a shirt of mail – was used, with plates gradually being added to give extra protection. There was also a transitional period in which a coat of plates was worn, each piece overlapping on the inside of the foundation garment.



Helmet
There were various types of helmet including the barbute, the Coventry Sallet, the great helm and the hounskull, but they all had a common purpose: to protect the head and face. Visors lifted away to allow the soldier to see better when he wasn't engaged in combat. A bevor would protect the throat from sword strikes.

Breastplate
Covering the torso, the breastplate protected the chest from the thrust of an enemy weapon and while it fell out of favour and was replaced by more flexible chainmail in the earlier Medieval period, it returned to use in the 13th century.

Rerebrace
The rerebrace would cover the upper arms and ensure good coverage above the elbow while allowing decent movement. The vambrace covered the lower arm and besagews would attach between the breastplate and the rerebrace to protect the armpit.

Gauntlets
Worn to protect the hands and wrists, gauntlets could be made of metal - and be worn over a sheepskin mitten - or from chainmail. In either case, their weight and structure meant they were also effective as an impromptu weapon.

Longsword
With its cruciform hilt and a blade of up to 110 centimetres, the longsword was lengthier than the trusty arming sword and it became particularly popular in the late Medieval period. It tended to be operated with two hands, the cross sometimes being used as a hook against cavalry.

Cuisse
This armoured plate was worn to protect the thigh (cuisse being French for thigh), thereby protecting the upper leg. Continental soldiers tended to be mounted and only needed protection from the front whereas in England, where foot combat was also typical, cuisses tended to protect the entire thigh including the back.

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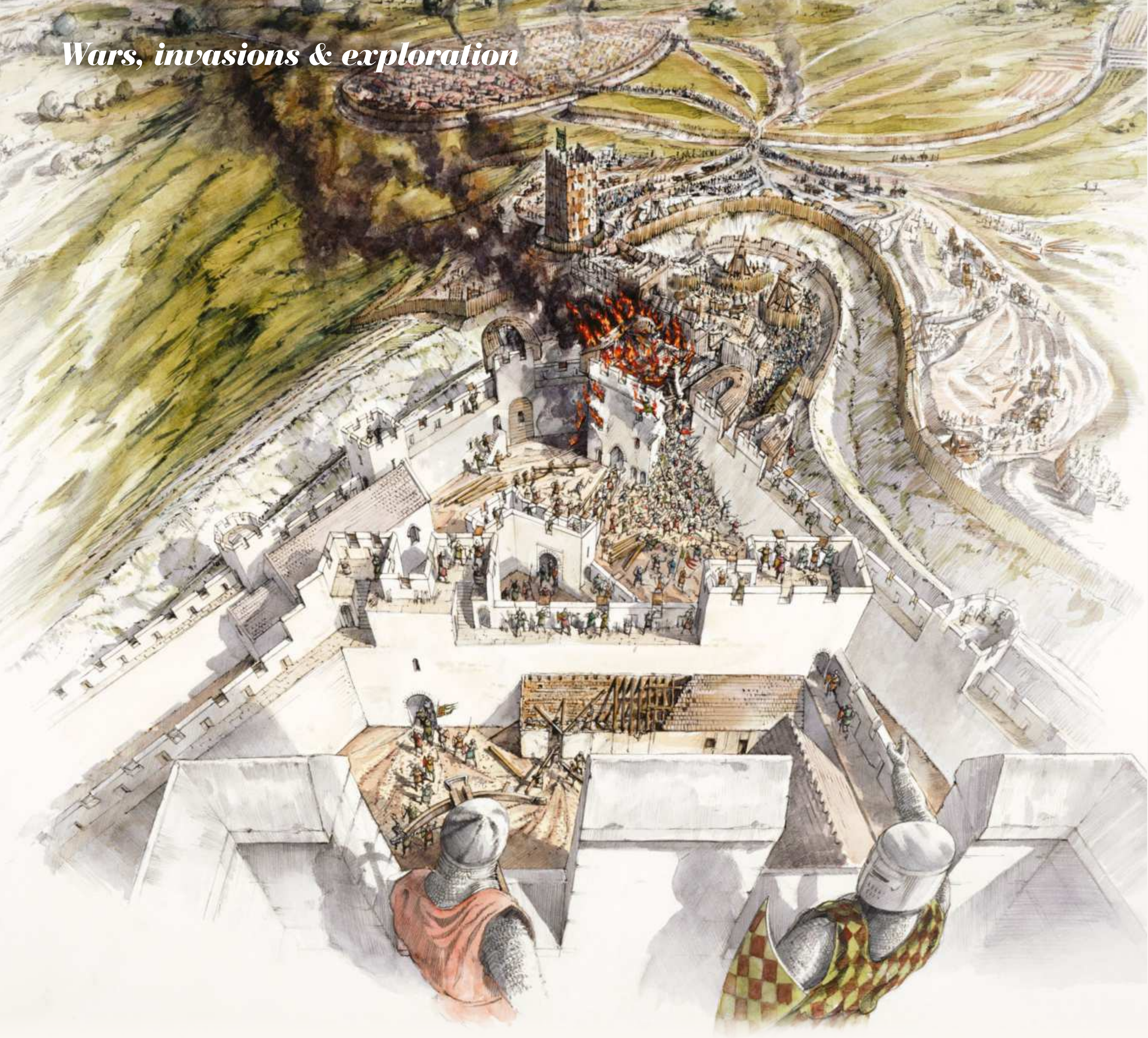


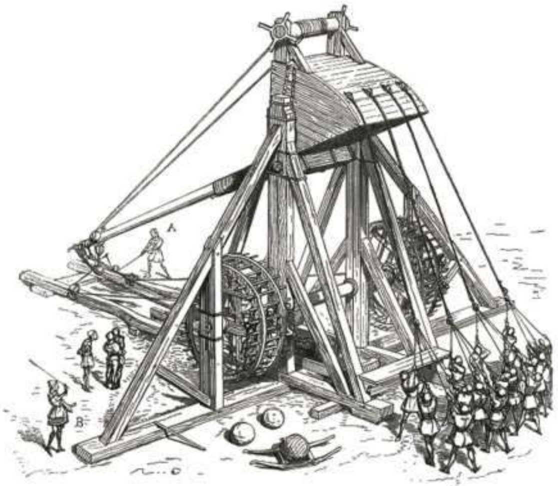
How to capture a Medieval castle

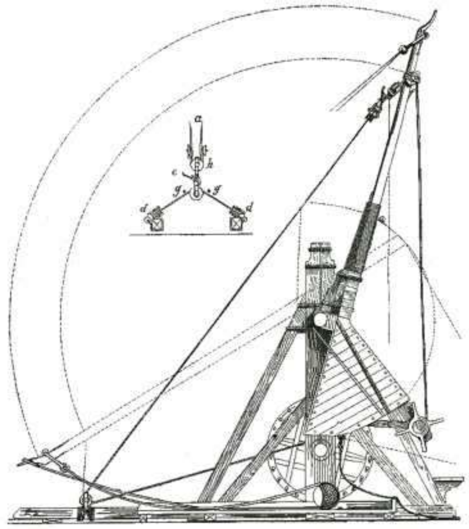
From demolishing walls to starving out defenders, a siege in the Middle Ages required innovative tactics, stamina and determination

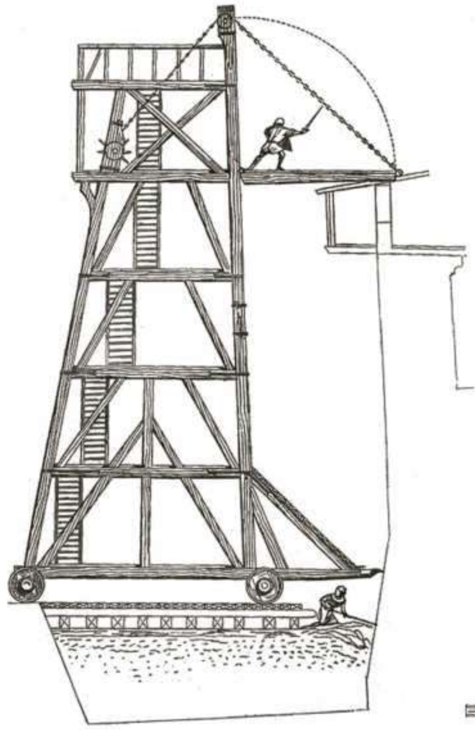
Castles were the power bases of the Medieval world. Occupied by kings, nobles and knights, defeating one of these strongholds wasn't easy. To successfully bring one down, a solid strategy was a must. First, the attacking force would need to occupy the surrounding lands to instil fear in the castle owners. If negotiation and diplomacy failed, an attacking force could resort to intimidation by seizing supply lines and pillaging the locality. If a white flag was still not forthcoming, the siege would officially begin. Prior to an attack, a messenger would sometimes be sent to the besieged castle, informing defenders of the force's intentions. After this notice was heeded, the castle would be restocked with weapons and provisions, ready to weather the coming storm.

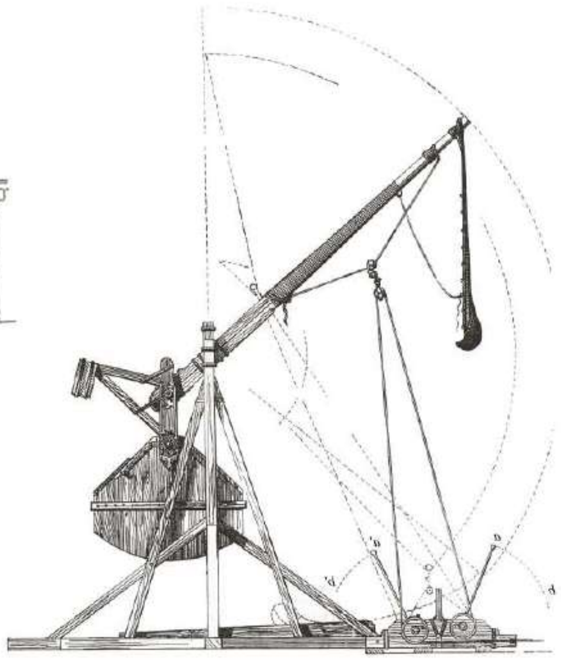
There were many ways to try and break down the fortifications. An expensive yet destructive method was the use of huge wooden siege engines. Ranging from long-range trebuchets to metal-capped battering rams, a castle could be assaulted from all directions. The best carpenters, blacksmiths and engineers were drawn from around the land to create the machines of war while knights who owed service provided the military muscle. Livestock, timber, tools and provisions would also be acquired. A camp was set up a safe distance from the castle and preparations would begin.

Meanwhile, the defenders made preparations of their own. Usually, a scorched-earth policy was implemented. This would deprive the surrounding area of any arable land to plunder, significantly depleting an advancing army's available resources. This involved doing major damage to the defenders' own land, but it was worthwhile if it helped prevent a siege. Inside the castle, men would be armed and stores restocked in anticipation of what was to follow. Sieging a castle was an imposing and frightening prospect and required inventive strategies, plentiful resources, a steely determination and a hefty slice of luck. Ready your mangonels and prepare for battle.



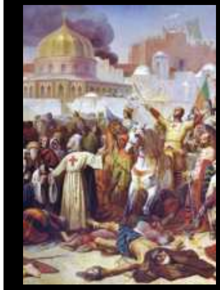






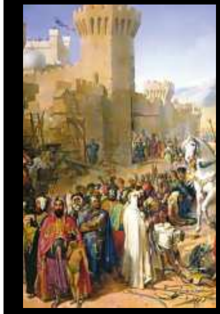
Five bloody Medieval sieges

A selection of the largest, longest and most destructive sieges from across the Middle Ages



Jerusalem 1099

Jerusalem is one of the most sieged cities in history, and in 1099 it experienced one of the bloodiest. Part of the First Crusade, the Muslim and Jewish population was massacred as the Crusaders burst through the gates, suffering heavy losses themselves.



Acre 1189-91

After negotiations failed, Saladin besieged the Crusader stronghold of Acre during the Third Crusade. The siege lasted a total of 23 months and resulted in many Crusader deaths, but Saladin was defeated and dealt a serious blow in his attempt to retake the Crusader kingdom.

Chateau Gaillard 1204

The impressive defences of this French castle were eventually brought down by King Phillip after eight months of battle. The siege included almost every type of siege engine and was fought on both land and sea against the fortress.

Rochester 1215

Part of the First Barons' War, the siege of Rochester was an example of attackers digging under a castle. A fire fuelled by pig fat was started underneath the battlements and the defenders eventually surrendered as winter set in.

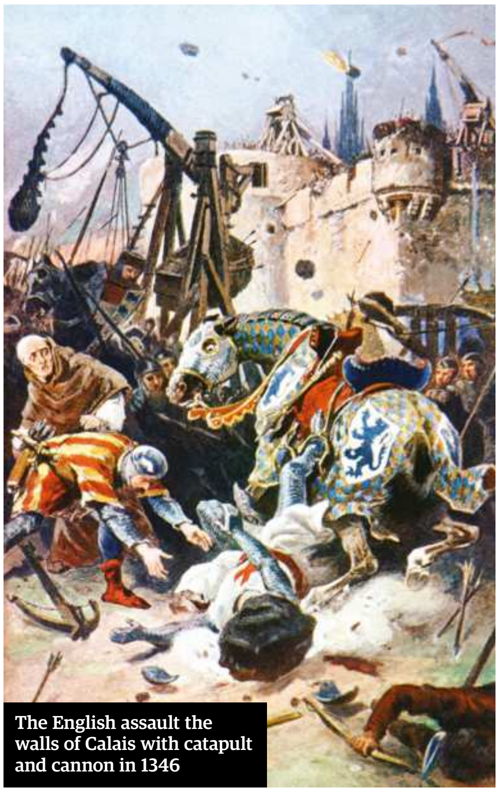
Cahir 1599

The most impregnable castle in the whole of Ireland, the Earl of Essex laid siege to the fortress under the orders of Queen Elizabeth I. It quickly succumbed to artillery, demonstrating how the advent of the cannon helped end the age of the Medieval castle.

Choose your weapons

With money to burn and a realm to conquer, barons would splash out on the biggest and best siege engines available

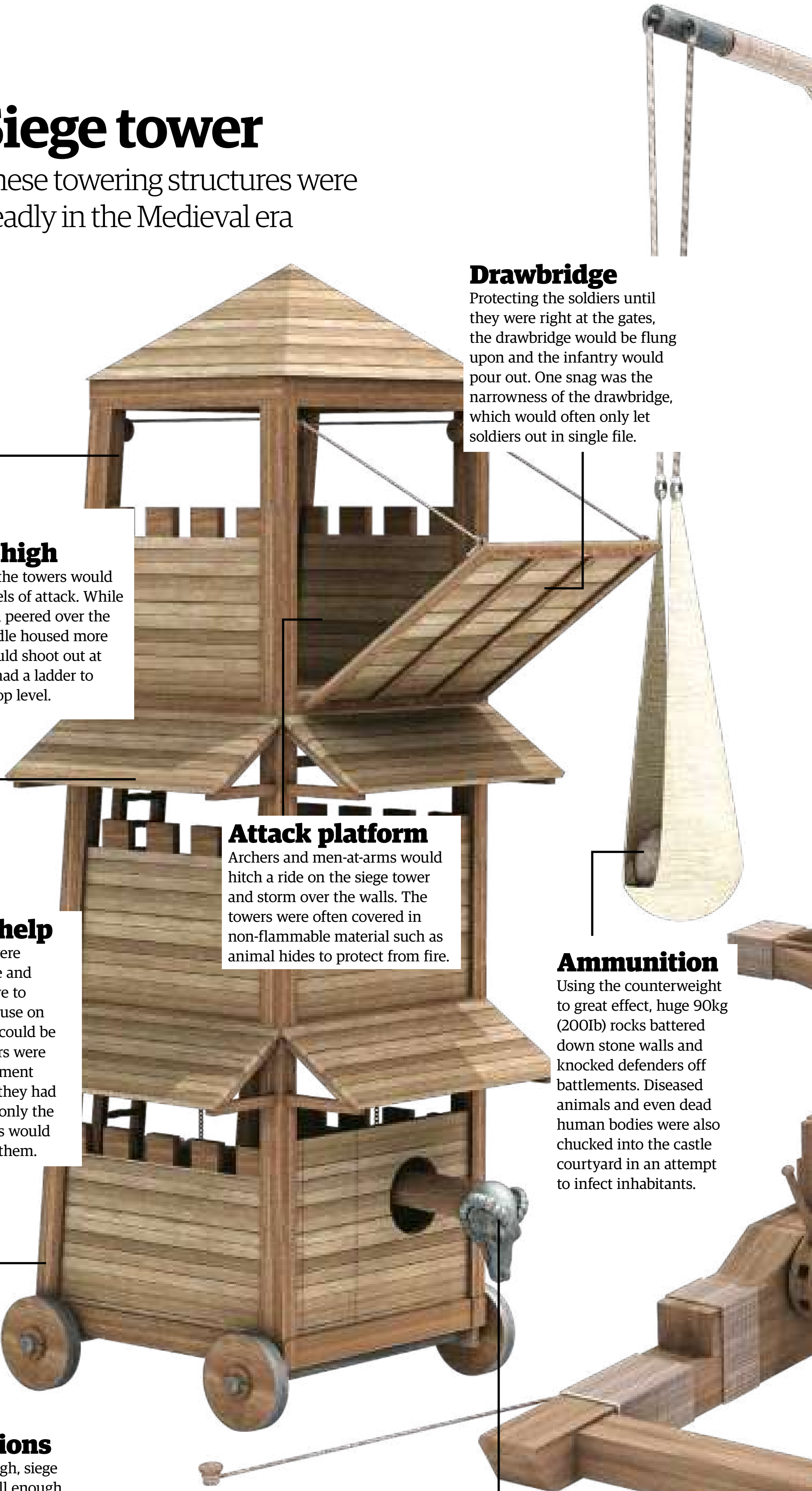
For the best possible chance of victory during a siege in the Middle Ages, huge siege engines were financed to bring death and destruction upon a fortress and its inhabitants. These imposing machines rumbling into view could even frighten castles into submission before an arrow was nocked. Different siege engines were useful against different types of castles, so commanders would purchase what they needed depending on the terrain and defences they were going to face. As castles were often built with sieges in mind, many were surrounded by moats and steep climbs. It was also important to take a range of siege engines to keep the attack varied and relentless. For example, siege towers could soak up arrows and keep the defenders at bay while trebuchets and battering rams did damage to other parts of the stronghold. To ensure their machines would last and be as effective as possible, barons would source the best builders and tools to create their wooden army.



The English assault the walls of Calais with catapult and cannon in 1346

Siege tower

These towering structures were deadly in the Medieval era



Drawbridge
Protecting the soldiers until they were right at the gates, the drawbridge would be flung upon and the infantry would pour out. One snag was the narrowness of the drawbridge, which would often only let soldiers out in single file.

Three storeys high
The largest of the towers would have three levels of attack. While the top section peered over the walls, the middle housed more troops who could shoot out at will, and also had a ladder to reinforce the top level.

Attack platform
Archers and men-at-arms would hitch a ride on the siege tower and storm over the walls. The towers were often covered in non-flammable material such as animal hides to protect from fire.

Ladder help
Siege towers were very expensive and labour-intensive to make, so their use on the battlefield could be limited. Ladders were used to supplement towers, but as they had no protection, only the bravest soldiers would dare climb up them.

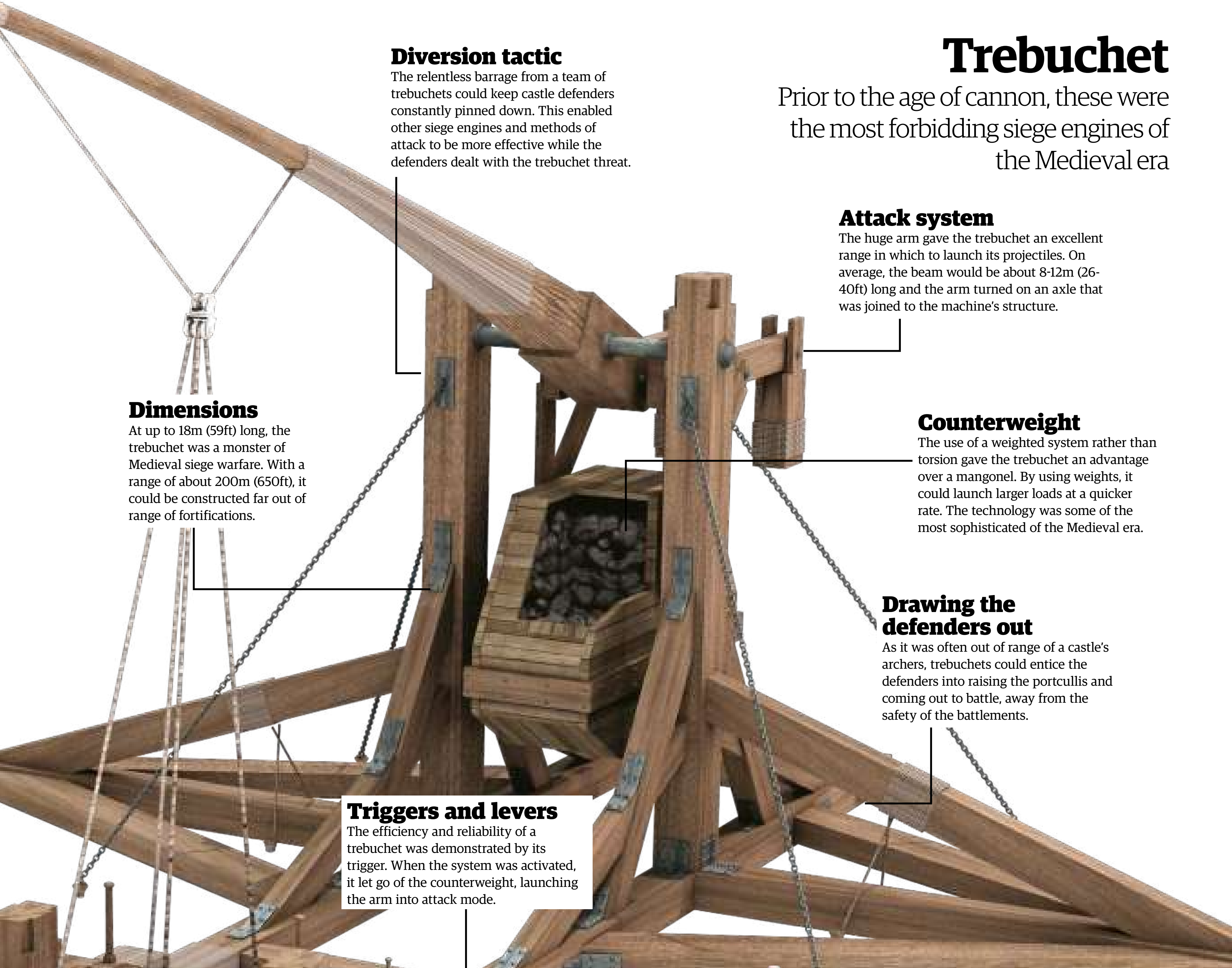
Ammunition
Using the counterweight to great effect, huge 90kg (200Ib) rocks battered down stone walls and knocked defenders off battlements. Diseased animals and even dead human bodies were also chucked into the castle courtyard in an attempt to infect inhabitants.

Dimensions
At 8m (26ft) high, siege towers were tall enough to rise over most castle defences. In response, many fortifications dredged moats or were constructed on the top of a hill to nullify their effectiveness.

Battering ram
As well being effective weapons on their own, battering rams could be housed within a siege tower. Now covered and part of a larger mechanism, the ram would bring down gates and walls while troops attacked the top of the battlements.

Trebuchet

Prior to the age of cannon, these were the most forbidding siege engines of the Medieval era



Diversion tactic

The relentless barrage from a team of trebuchets could keep castle defenders constantly pinned down. This enabled other siege engines and methods of attack to be more effective while the defenders dealt with the trebuchet threat.

Attack system

The huge arm gave the trebuchet an excellent range in which to launch its projectiles. On average, the beam would be about 8-12m (26-40ft) long and the arm turned on an axle that was joined to the machine's structure.

Dimensions

At up to 18m (59ft) long, the trebuchet was a monster of Medieval siege warfare. With a range of about 200m (650ft), it could be constructed far out of range of fortifications.

Counterweight

The use of a weighted system rather than torsion gave the trebuchet an advantage over a mangonel. By using weights, it could launch larger loads at a quicker rate. The technology was some of the most sophisticated of the Medieval era.

Drawing the defenders out

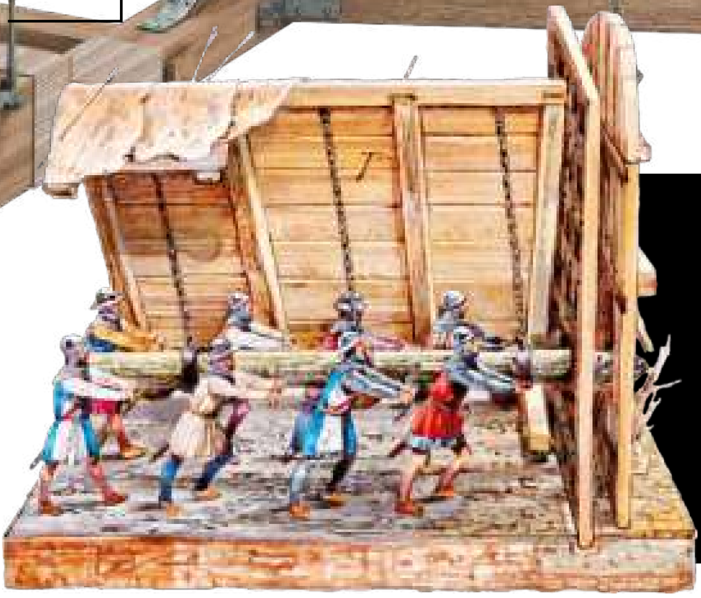
As it was often out of range of a castle's archers, trebuchets could entice the defenders into raising the portcullis and coming out to battle, away from the safety of the battlements.

Triggers and levers

The efficiency and reliability of a trebuchet was demonstrated by its trigger. When the system was activated, it let go of the counterweight, launching the arm into attack mode.

Stakes

Despite its imposing figure, a trebuchet could be quite brittle. Stakes were hammered into the ground to prevent it falling or lifting when fired. It would have to be well protected as one direct hit could break the whole mechanism.



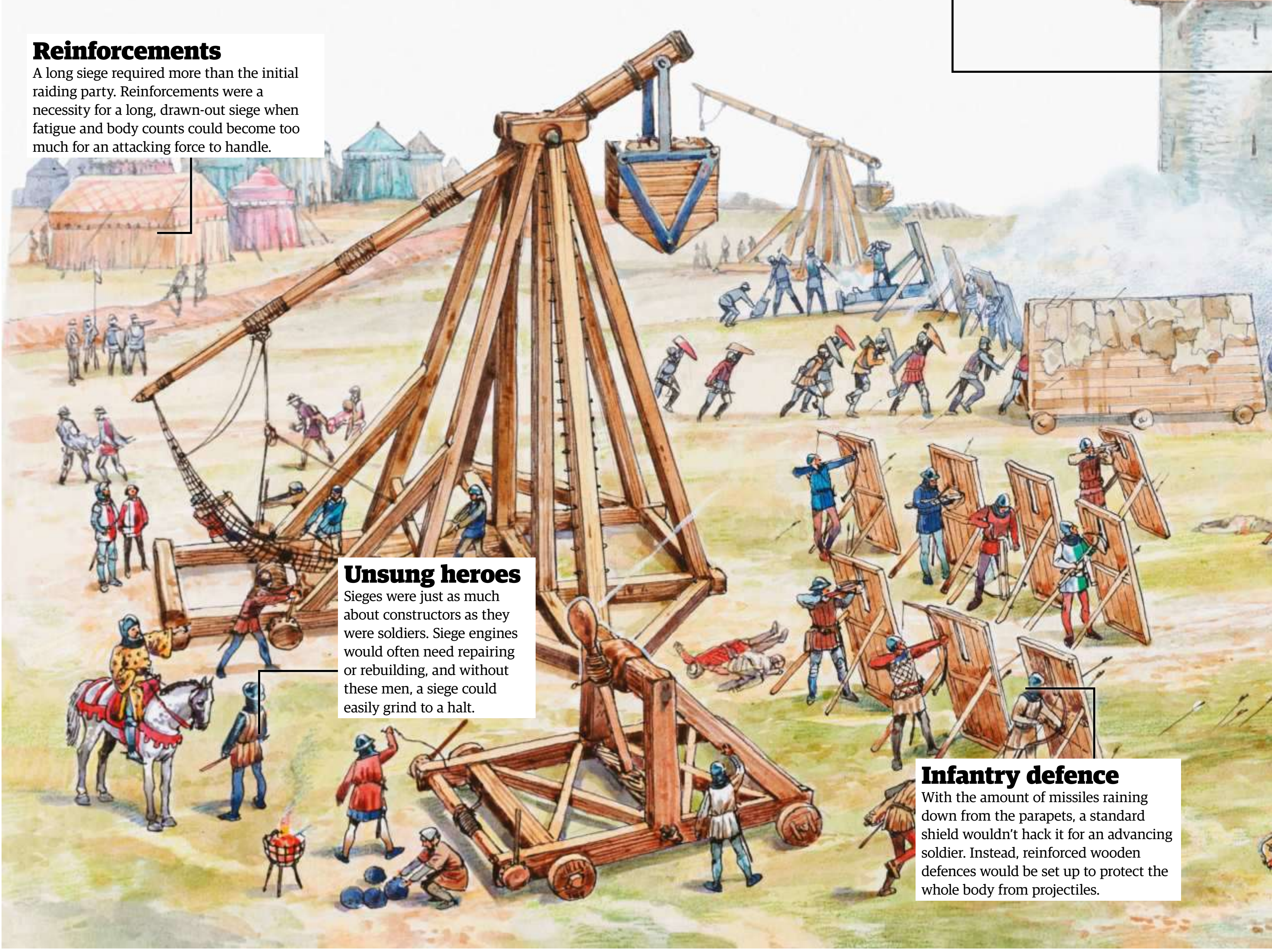
Battering rams and catapults

Better known as a mangonel, the catapult was an update of the Roman onager, which used torsion technology to fling projectiles. Perhaps the most primitive of all siege weapons, the battering ram was also very effective. Used to pound down walls, the wooden stake was often steel capped and could be part of a larger mechanism.

Launch the attack

When negotiations failed and intimidation proved futile, siege was the only option

Getting a siege under way wasn't just a matter of loading up the engines and firing the first projectile. Depending on the forces available and the layout of the castle, each attack would begin differently. Most of the time, though, attackers would first attempt psychological warfare by launching severed heads into the castle. Then, the first target would be a weak point of the wall. In response, defenders barricaded their weakest points and increased attacks on the most potent siege engines. The key to a successful siege was continuous attack, as a break in hostilities would give defenders time to repair damage. Also essential was stopping supplies reaching the castle, preventing the arrival of weapons and resources. If the breakthrough still didn't come, aggressors would spread out their attacks. Castles were often undermanned, so attacking from all angles could overwhelm them. If this still didn't work, it was time to get creative. Mining was a common way of getting in to a castle while staying out of the line of fire. Sieges could take months or even years, but attackers could often wait it out for longer than defenders. If the castle supply lines were cut off, it was only a matter of time before malnutrition and then starvation set in.

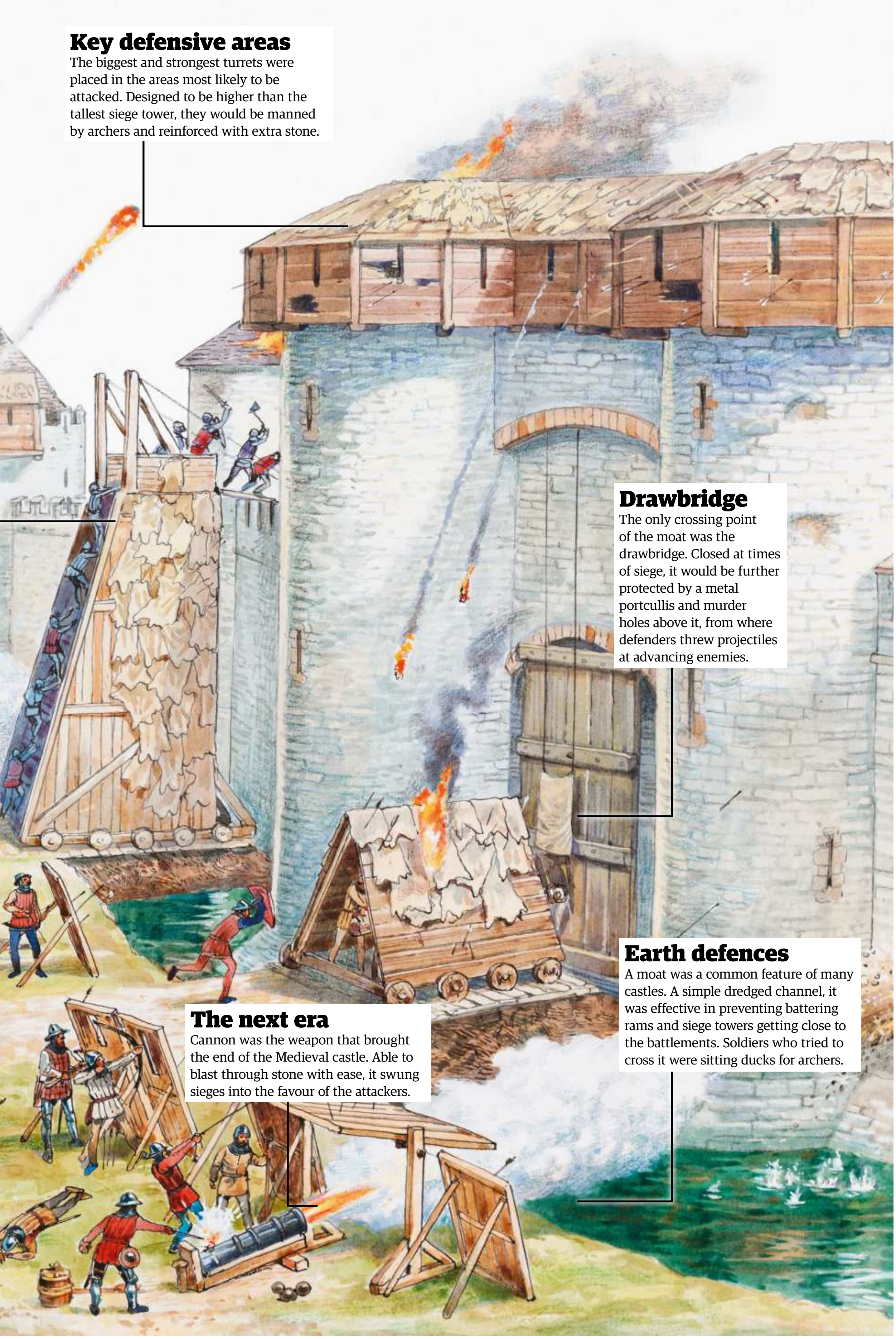


What have the Romans ever done for us?
Both battering rams and siege towers were first used in the ancient era but had been substantially improved on by the Middle Ages. Towers were now bigger and better and could scale higher walls while rams had stronger steel caps for more penetration.

Reinforcements
A long siege required more than the initial raiding party. Reinforcements were a necessity for a long, drawn-out siege when fatigue and body counts could become too much for an attacking force to handle.

Unsung heroes
Sieges were just as much about constructors as they were soldiers. Siege engines would often need repairing or rebuilding, and without these men, a siege could easily grind to a halt.

Infantry defence
With the amount of missiles raining down from the parapets, a standard shield wouldn't hack it for an advancing soldier. Instead, reinforced wooden defences would be set up to protect the whole body from projectiles.



Key defensive areas

The biggest and strongest turrets were placed in the areas most likely to be attacked. Designed to be higher than the tallest siege tower, they would be manned by archers and reinforced with extra stone.

Drawbridge

The only crossing point of the moat was the drawbridge. Closed at times of siege, it would be further protected by a metal portcullis and murder holes above it, from where defenders threw projectiles at advancing enemies.

Earth defences

A moat was a common feature of many castles. A simple dredged channel, it was effective in preventing battering rams and siege towers getting close to the battlements. Soldiers who tried to cross it were sitting ducks for archers.

The next era

Cannon was the weapon that brought the end of the Medieval castle. Able to blast through stone with ease, it swung sieges into the favour of the attackers.

How to defend a castle

When the attackers were on your doorstep, these measures could get you out of trouble

Look for spies

Prior to a siege, spies were often sent out to report on a castle's frailties. To prevent a Trojan horse-like attack, castle rulers would keep close tabs on who and what was entering and leaving their gates.

Ripples in the water

Underground, some of the most vicious fighting of the entire siege was fought in tunnels. If defenders lost here, their perimeter would be compromised, so guards would place a pot of water near the walls that rippled when miners were below.

Specialised battlements

Castle walls, built with attack in mind, were littered with anti-siege measures. Arrow loops gave archers a good shot at attackers while towers and gatehouses were constructed as troop garrisons. A barbican passage at the entrance would act as a death trap to oncoming foes.

Retreat to the keep

When the outer walls were breached, a strong keep was essential. The centrepiece of a castle, if the keep was surrounded, the only chance would be to hold on until help arrived and hope the food didn't run out.

Allied assistance

If an assaulting force was preoccupied with a siege, it would be vulnerable to attack from the rear. Any distraction would relieve the pressure and allow a counter-attack to vanquish the enemy once and for all.

What to do with the enemy

After defeat, what was left of the defenders had to be dealt with

Take prisoners

The defenders would eject women and children out of the keep. This cruel tactic gave the attackers prisoners to be used as a bargaining tool for surrender, but now only the best fighters remained with a much larger food supply.

Total annihilation

A popular method of ending a siege was killing all that stood in the way. Sometimes the nobility were held for ransom but, like at the siege of Bedford Castle in 1224, everyone could be killed as a warning to others.

New tenants

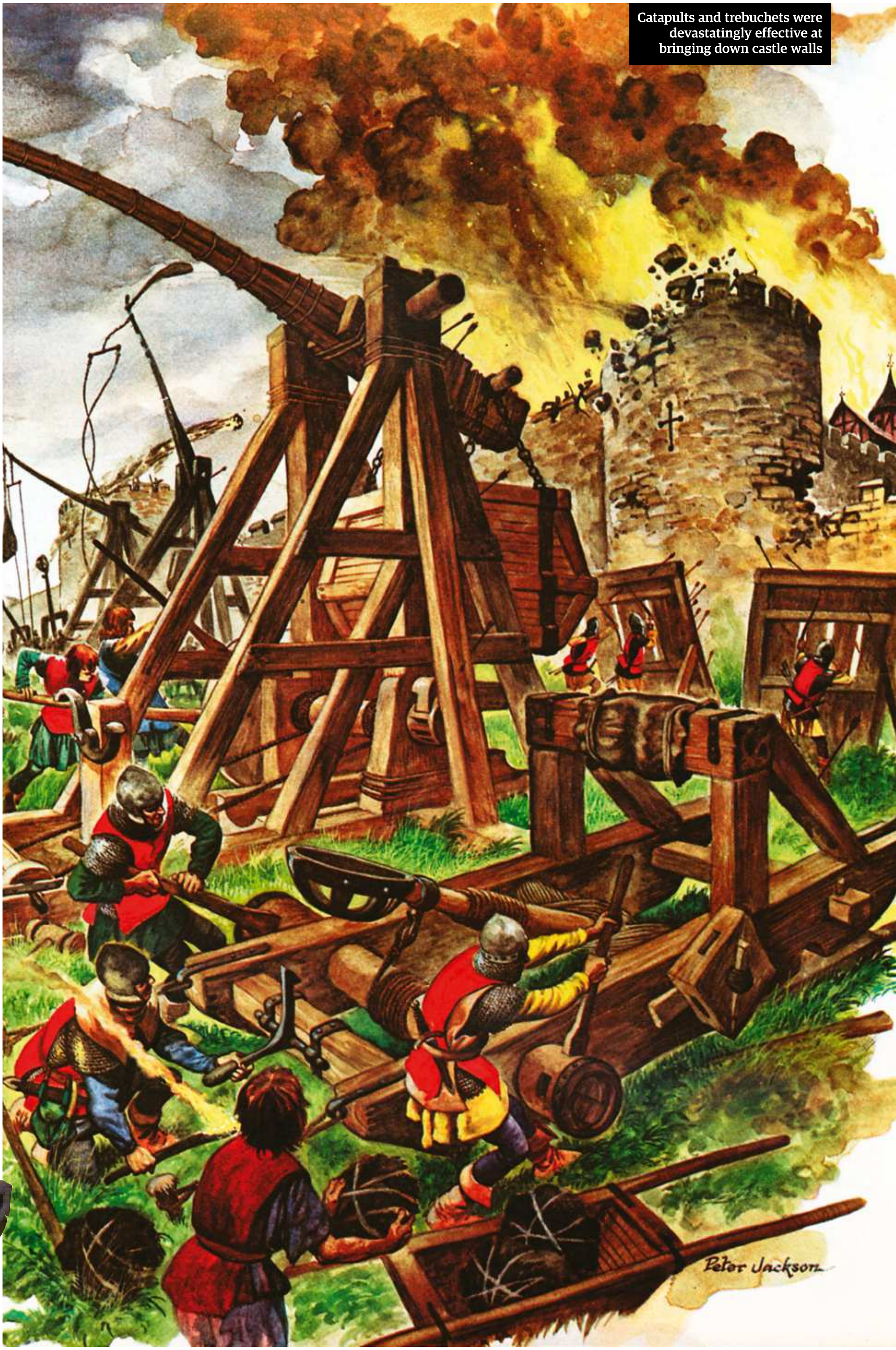
If the castle was in a strategic location or was an influential power base, the invading army would take it. It would act as an outpost on the frontier of a land and the former defenders would be exiled or enslaved.

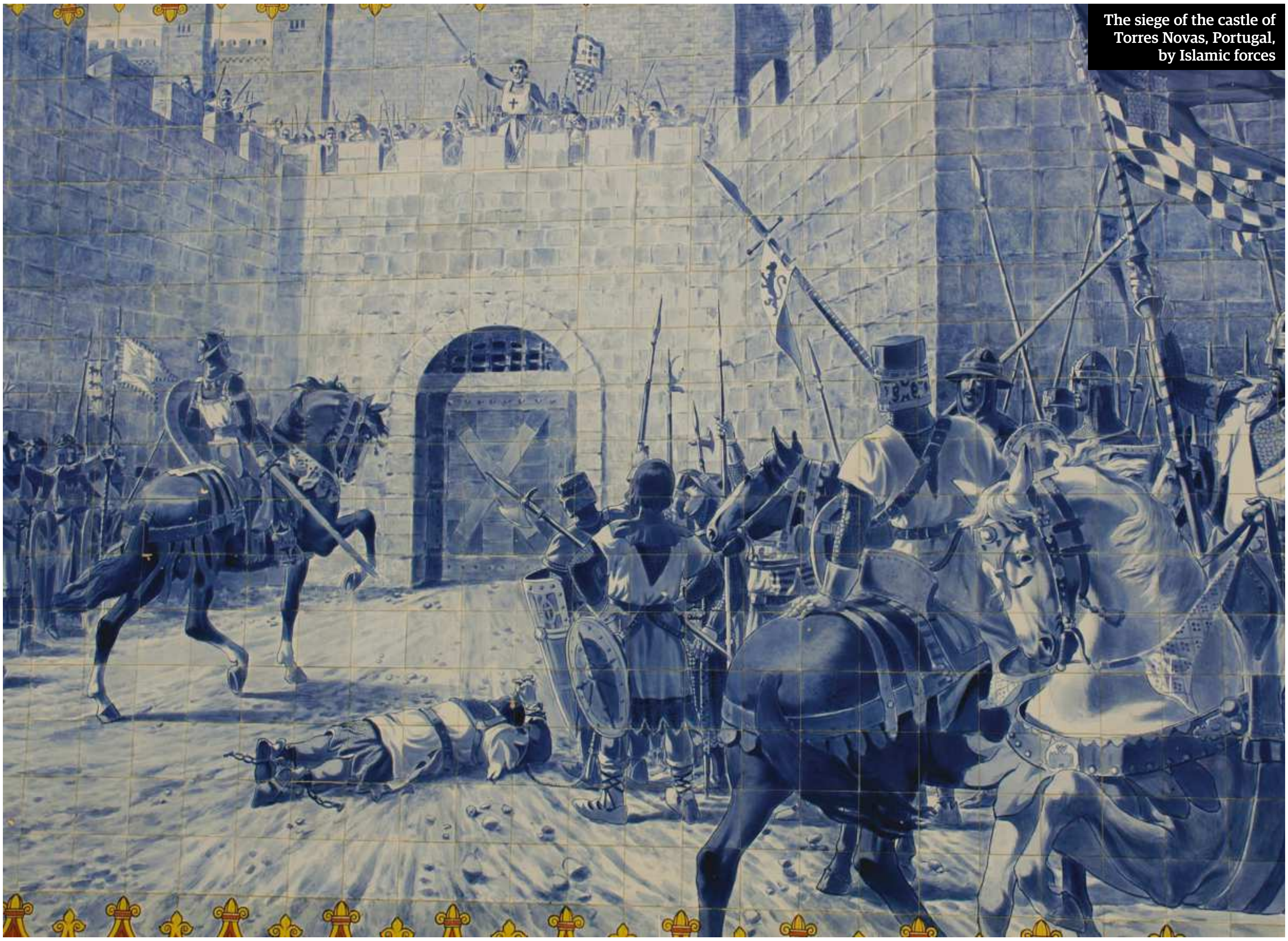
It's a trap!

Defenders of a castle would implement all types of booby traps. These would be left for the new occupants to find for themselves and sometimes it was done the hard way. Using a captured prisoner would be a good tactic.

Raze to the ground

The advent of cannon made castles much easier to demolish. For many castles, the English Civil War was their last hurrah but they still proved valuable, such as when Stirling Castle held out against the Jacobites a century later.


Catapults and trebuchets were devastatingly effective at bringing down castle walls



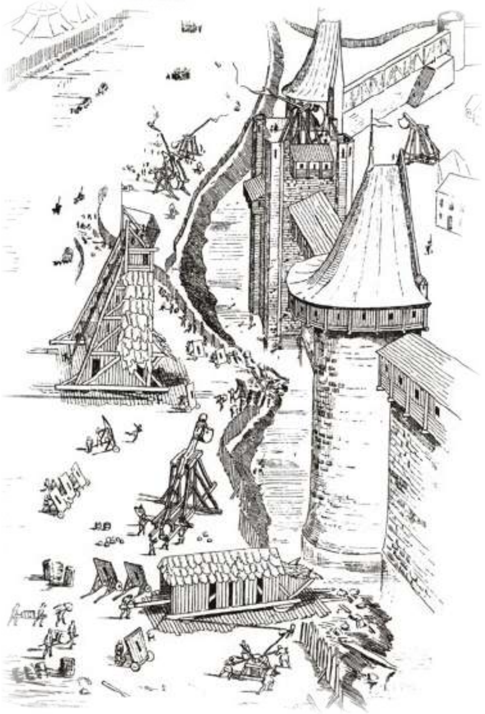
The siege of the castle of Torres Novas, Portugal, by Islamic forces

Take the castle

With the outer walls down, it was time to storm the courtyards and break into the keep

When the walls were overrun and bodies lay strewn around the bailey, the keep, the centrepiece of the castle defences, was the only thing that stood in the way of victory. Some keeps were merely the central building, but many had defences of their own. They could contain arrow loops and crenellations to help with the last-ditch defence of the castle. As the attacking soldiers gathered in the bailey, they would be vulnerable to arrow fire. Only plate armour stood any chance against the power of a crossbow bolt, so soldiers with chain mail would be in danger until the keep was breached. The keep would also contain the castle's stores, so in the event of a siege, the population were best placed to try to hold out for as long as possible. With the keep the only structure now occupied by the defenders, the attackers could benefit from controlling the other buildings in the castle. The armoury could be pillaged for extra weapons and tools, and after the siege ended, stores could be raided and horses taken from stables to bolster the army for the next assault. The defence of the keep was always a last resort and usually meant victory for the aggressors.

Once the castle was taken, it was up to the attackers to decide the fate of the castle ruler; this depended on how merciless they were. When the enemies had all been dealt with, there was a choice to be made: rule the castle and make it the centre of a new occupied kingdom, or raze it to the ground and let the ruin stand as an example of what happens when a castle puts up resistance. Either way, the next siege is most likely not too far away. Pack up your trebuchets!



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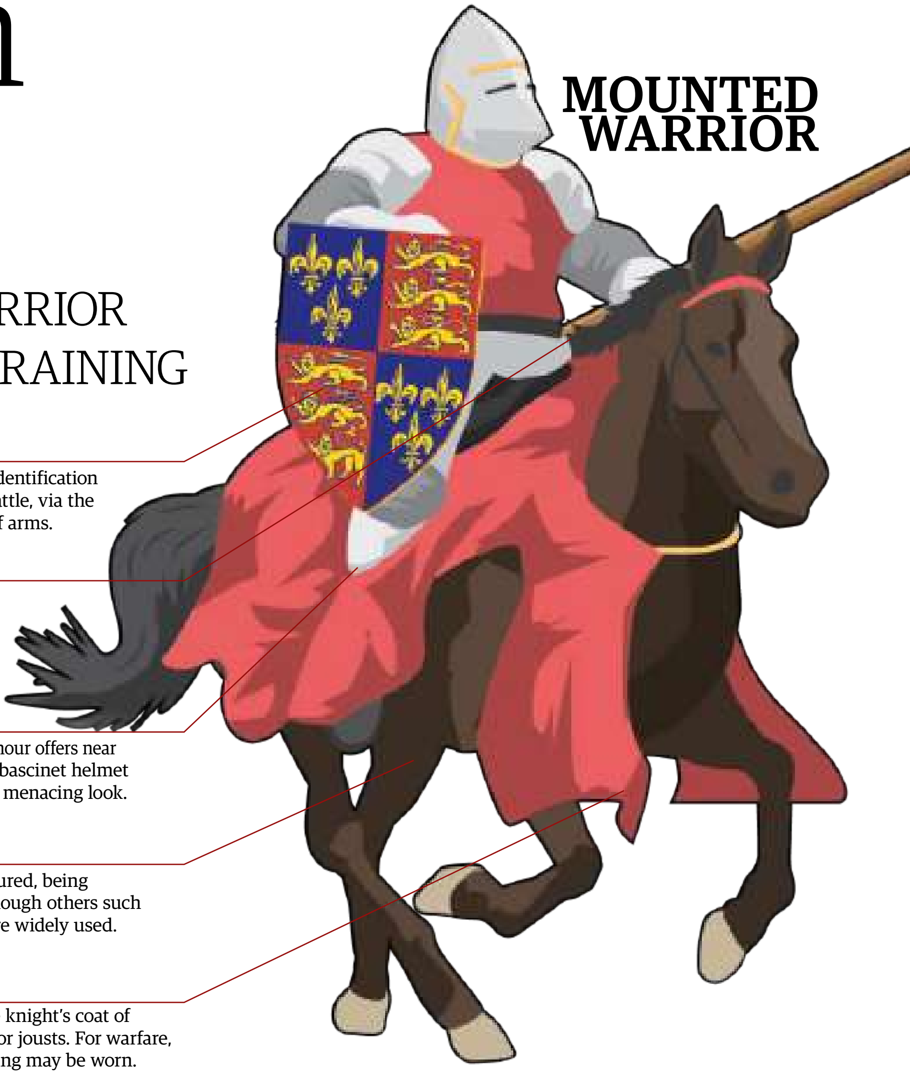
How to train as a knight

BECOMING AN ELITE CAVALRY WARRIOR TOOK MORE THAN A DECADE OF TRAINING

Across much of Medieval Europe, the feudal system of grants of land made in return for service held sway. Kings gave vast areas to their wealthiest nobles in return for military support. Similarly, those nobles gave smaller plots to lower lords, who ultimately rented it to peasants to farm. Yet while kings and higher nobles weren't strangers to battle, it was those lower lords, or knights, who were the true warrior class. Their fighting skills were so valued that they were often ransomed if captured in combat. Small wonder, then, that acquiring those skills took years of determination and dedication.



MOUNTED WARRIOR

Shield
For defence, but also for identification in the heat of confused battle, via the knight's decorative coat of arms.

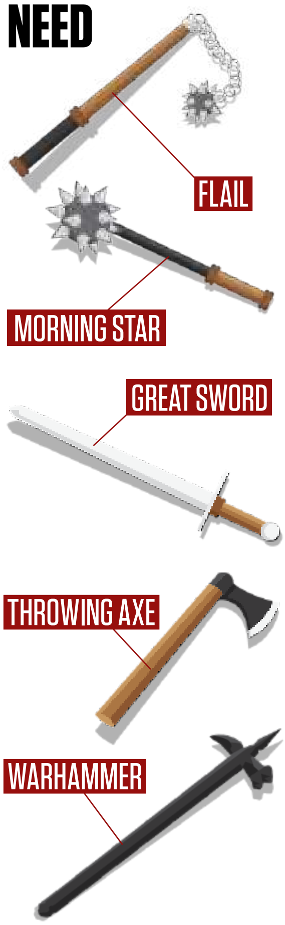
Lance
Some four metres in length, it has a blunt, flat end for jousting, but is sharpened for combat.

Armour
By 1400, full plate steel armour offers near full-body protection. The bascinet helmet encasing the head gives a menacing look.

Horse
The destrier breed is favoured, being strong, quick and agile, though others such as coursers or rounceys are widely used.

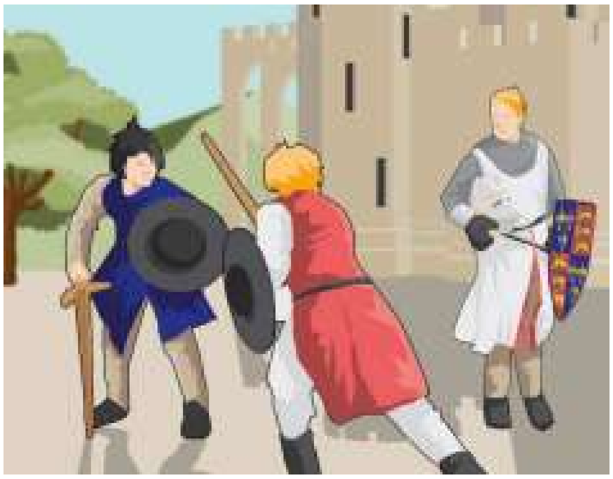
Covering
A caparison reflecting the knight's coat of arms adorns his charger for jousts. For warfare, horse armour called barding may be worn.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED



01 Be lucky at birth

While it is not unheard of for sons of lowly peasants to rise to knighthood, it helps greatly to be born of noble, wealthy stock. Offspring of lordly knights with access to expensive horses and equipment have all the advantages, yet you will still have to prove yourself worthy of honour in the daunting years ahead.

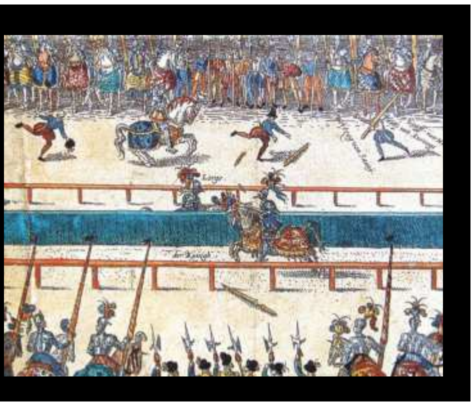


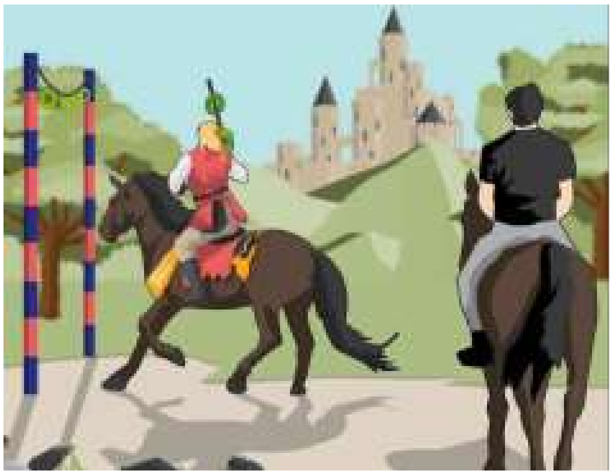
02 Play gets serious

Around the age of seven, young boys take on the role of page to a lord. As one, you'll begin to learn skills like archery, falconry and of course horsemanship, as well being taught chivalry – the codes by which a knight should live. Importantly, play with wooden swords subtly teaches you the vital craft of swordsmanship.

How not to... enjoy the benefits of knighthood

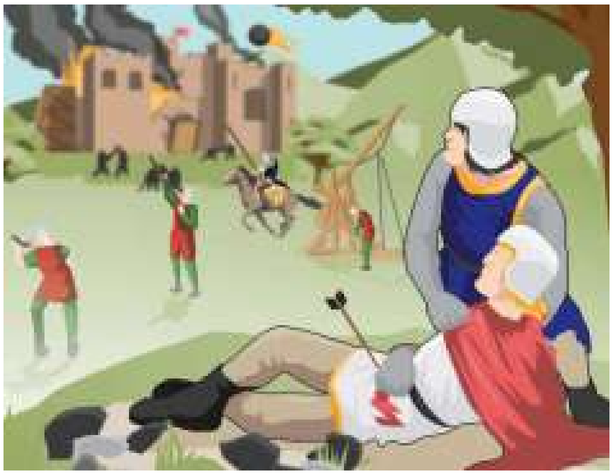
King Henry II of France had put himself in a strong position. The peace treaty of Cateau-Cambresis had been concluded, ending 60 years of conflict with Spain over disputed neighbouring territories. His daughter Elisabeth had wed King Phillip II of Spain, cementing relations between the two countries. England, also signatories of the treaty, had given Calais back to France, and even Henry's sickly son Francis had been married off to Mary, Queen of Scots, confirming another alliance. The prospects for France and its 40-year-old King looked healthy. In celebration, Henry, a fervent huntsman and joust competitor, hosted a tournament. He challenged Gabriel Montgomery, lord of Lorge and captain of the Scottish Guard, at the French court. When they clashed, Montgomery's lance shattered. Splinters flew everywhere, including through Henry's eye and into his brain. He swiftly absolved Montgomery of any blame, but soon deteriorated, dying ten days later.





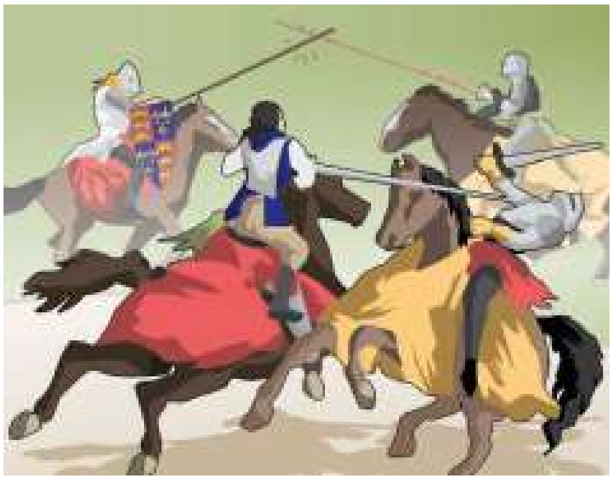
03 Service for knowledge

Pages become squires at about 14. You'll have learned to handle a lance on wooden horses, but now you're developing those skills on live ones. Those horses need tending, though, and that's one of your tasks, along with cleaning armour and weapons. Smart squires learn plenty watching the knight they serve in tournament jousts - yet he'll have obligations too...



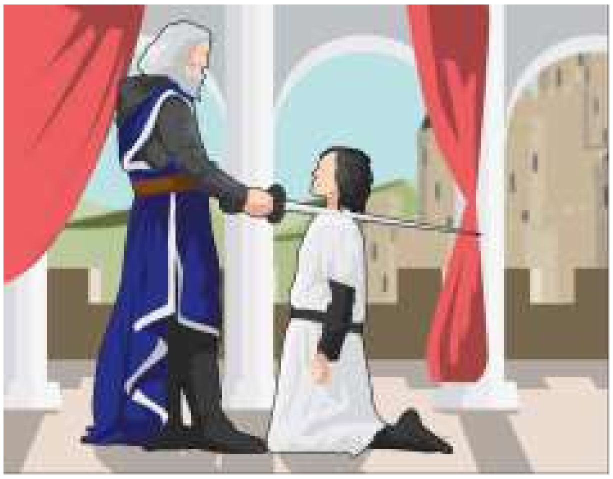
04 The apprenticeship gets real

...If the king summons your knight to battle, he will take his squires with him. Before, he'll likely have been educating you about castle defence and siege warfare - now you're finding out firsthand. One of the harshest lessons of all, of life and death, cannot be escaped. Whether vaunted kings or fledgling squires, people die on battlefields.



05 Forged in battle

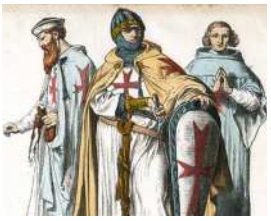
You live to tell the tale, and to fight another day. You honour your friend's memory by striving to be as good a warrior as him. In further campaigns, you don't hesitate to join dismounted knights as they fight hand-to-hand in brutal, bloody melees. Courage and bravery combined with your diligently acquired skills mark you out as special.



06 A tap on the shoulder

The usual age at which a squire can be dubbed a knight is 21. Your exceptional battlefield valour, however, may mean you receive the honour early. After a night of solitary prayer, you swear oaths to protect the king and to act chivalrously. A sword is placed on your shoulder, and you hear the treasured, ceremonial word: "Arise, Sir Knight!"

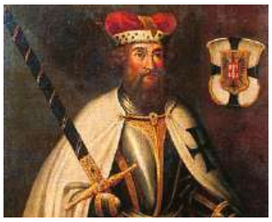
4 FAMOUS... ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD



KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

C. 1118-1312, MIDDLE EAST

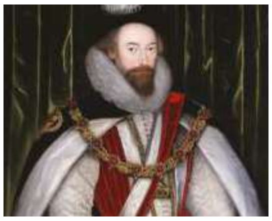
This military religious order protected pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land, but was disbanded by Pope Clement V due to pressure from Phillip IV of France.



TEUTONIC KNIGHTS

C. 1190-PRESENT, GERMANY

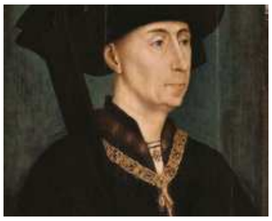
Founded during the Crusades as a nursing, then military, unit, it later relocated to subdue the pagan Baltic region. It is a religious charitable organisation today.



THE ORDER OF THE GARTER

1348-PRESENT, ENGLAND

Set up by Edward III, it consists of the sovereign, the Prince of Wales and no more than 24 members.



THE ORDER OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE

1430-PRESENT, FRANCE

Founded in Burgundy by Phillip III, it later became associated with Austria and Spain.

© Ed Crooks

Alfred the Great

Warrior, scholar and king of the Anglo-Saxons, Alfred led a great crusade to unite his kingdom and rid it of Viking invaders

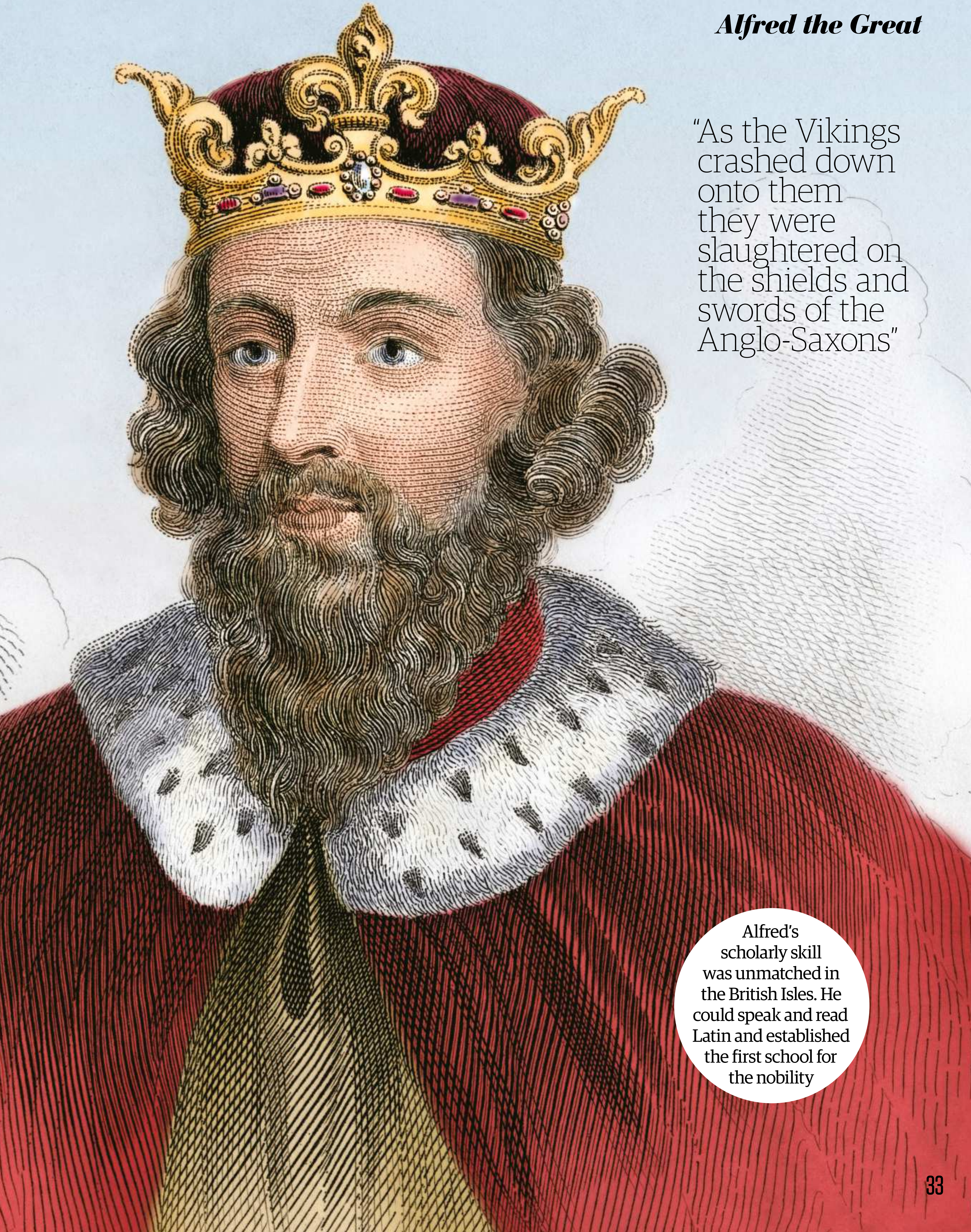
In the dark and foreboding landscape of 9th-century England, the Anglo-Saxon civilisation, which had called the British Isles home for 400 years, stood on the brink of collapse. Fierce warriors descended on English shores from dragon-headed longships, looking for plunder and bloodshed. Children huddled close to their families inside their thatched long halls, fearing the panicked screams of terrified neighbours - the calling card of these merciless raiders. The Viking invaders were not satisfied with just crops or gold, although for rural farmers like the Anglo-Saxons this was bad enough. They wanted to enslave and brutalise the people themselves and destroy their original society. With the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms divided or conquered, Wessex (The Kingdom of the West Saxons) stood alone against this unstoppable menace. It was in this bleak and embattled world that King Aethelwulf's wife Osburh gave birth to their fifth son in an unremarkable Berkshire village in 849 CE. They named him Alfred and he would change the fortunes of the Anglo-Saxon cause forever.

> Alfred was the first king on the British Isles who established a universal set of written legal rights for the people of his lands

Alfred was forced to grow up quickly, learning the ways of an Anglo-Saxon warrior. He was taught to ride, hawk, hunt and, most importantly, how to defend himself with a shield and kill with a sword. The family he grew up in was a close-knit group and, in keeping with Anglo-Saxon families at the time, many generations of the same kin lived under one roof and the elders passed down their knowledge to the young. While Alfred saw the practical lessons he was learning from his father's warriors as a duty, his real interests lay in the scholarly works his father engrossed himself in. He particularly enjoyed poetry and one story involving this passion showed an unrelenting determination that would follow him into adulthood. His mother had promised one of her five sons an illuminated book of Anglo-Saxon poetry for the first one of them who could memorise the text off by heart. Alfred could not read, so he found a teacher and made him repeat every line in the book until he had it completely memorised. He won his prize and proved to his family that when he wanted something he would get it.

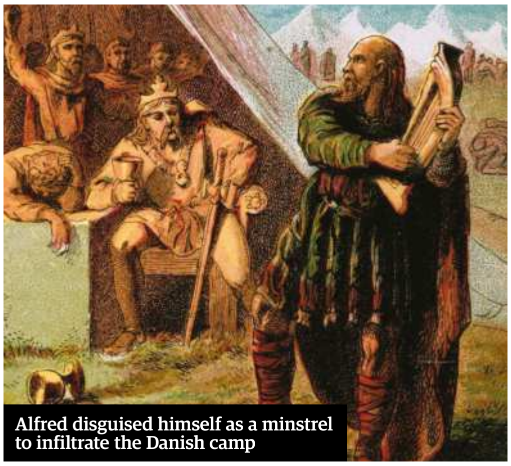
Boyhood games and poetry recitals came to an abrupt end when a Viking army landed in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of East Angles in 865. Stories of these iron-willed and bloodthirsty warriors had circulated in his father's court and it was widely feared that they were undefeatable. Alfred disagreed; if his years learning about his ancestors and hunting game had taught him anything it was that no enemy was indestructible. The huge Viking war host, led by the fearsome warriors Halfdan and Ivar the Boneless, invaded Northumbria, looted York and then turned back to East Angles. The host captured the king of East Angles, Edward, and in a display of power killed him in a ritual sacrifice to their pagan gods. They renamed Edward's realm East Anglia before turning their attention to Wessex, quickly taking the small town of Reading in 870.

There was little doubt in Alfred's mind that the terror and destruction the Vikings had wrought across the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms would be brought to Wessex. He and his older brother Aethelred set out to meet them in open combat,



"As the Vikings crashed down onto them they were slaughtered on the shields and swords of the Anglo-Saxons"

Alfred's scholarly skill was unmatched in the British Isles. He could speak and read Latin and established the first school for the nobility


Alfred disguised himself as a minstrel to infiltrate the Danish camp

mobilised men to serve in their army and after days of marching they met the Vikings on a ridge near Ashdown. The Vikings were surprised by the hot-blooded aggression of Alfred; he attacked uphill - like a "wild boar", according to the chronicler Bishop Asser - tearing into the Viking lines and causing them to retreat while his brother was still at prayer. It was said afterward that the field was "covered in bodies." After years of plundering the Vikings had finally met their match.

Alfred's triumph was celebrated throughout Wessex, but it was to be short-lived. The Battle of Ashdown was followed by defeat after defeat; large stretches of Wessex were soon under Viking control. It was during these bleak days of 871 that Aethelred died and Alfred claimed the throne of his embattled kingdom. He knew he could no longer defeat the Vikings and attempted to pay them off, affording the realm some respite, but the raids soon continued, so in 876, he locked swords with his greatest adversary, the Viking chieftain Guthrum, at Wareham. In a siege that involved Alfred using longships off the Dorset coast to block the Vikings' escape route to the sea, Guthrum was defeated and made to swear an oath of peace to Alfred on a ring of the Norse battle god Odin. In an act that Alfred would never forget, Guthrum went back on his word, murdered Alfred's emissaries and inflicted a crushing defeat on Alfred's forces at Chippenham during a Christian feast day. It was an act designed to reaffirm Guthrum's fierce commitment to his warrior gods.

Alfred barely escaped with his life, most of his men had been killed or captured by the Viking host and it seemed that all was lost. He ran into the marshes and spent the next few months evading capture, eventually holing up in a peasant's house. A story was written in later chronicles that he was so consumed by the threat to his kingdom that when asked to watch over some cakes by a peasant woman, his mind wandered and they burned. The woman admonished him, saying, "Look here, man, you hesitate to turn the loaves which you see to be burning, yet you're quite happy to eat them when they come warm from the oven." Rather than punish her, Alfred was said to have acted humbly. The tale not only showed how far the king had fallen but how his troubles had now affected his character.

Rather than surrendering his kingdom, Alfred gathered his warriors around Southampton and used guerrilla tactics to turn the tables on the raiders until he could nail them down to one last engagement at Edington. It was the greatest battle of Alfred's career. The moment was captured by one of his scribes: "Then the band of bold men was quickly made ready, men brave in battle [...] warriors marched out, bore banners of victory [...] heroes beneath their helmets at the break of dawn; the shields resounded loudly." Guthrum lead a huge charge into the Anglo-Saxon forces, hoping to smash Alfred and his men

Alfred's commitment to Christianity was well known; the Pope gave him a piece of what was thought to be the true cross

Alfred the warrior and tactician

Warfare during Alfred's reign was not for the faint of heart. Battles involved thousands of fierce warriors brutally killing each other with swords, axes, maces or any other sharp object that came to hand in uncontrolled melees. Battlefields would run with blood as the victor claimed their prize of crops, loot and slaves from the local populace. The Anglo-Saxon tactic of forming a shield wall to protect their warriors against incoming missiles was partially effective at keeping their soldiers alive so they could close in for hand-to-hand combat, but its effects were limited against a highly mobile foe like the Vikings, who specialised in surrounding the enemy quickly. Alfred was aware of this problem and of the relative weakness of mustering a diffuse and at times reluctant community of settlements to stave off encroaching Viking raids. He ordered a fledgling Anglo-Saxon navy, with bigger ships than the Vikings', and the construction of a system of forts throughout Wessex known as burhs, to allow his warriors to effectively defend their homes from the invaders. He also established a mobile standing army that could respond to foreign threats far more quickly than the hapless local fyrd or army. It also meant that the Vikings could no longer claim land and lordship over the people they conquered, allowing Alfred to consolidate his hold over his own kingdom.

Defining moment

Battle of Ashdown

8 January 871 CE

Alfred leads an attack on Viking positions at Ashdown after the Vikings begin to sweep through the area and into Wessex. Knowing that a muster of all available warriors would be the only way to secure victory, Alfred finds a Saraen stone and blows into it. The large boom that this creates musters all the men in the area to battle. The fighting lasts hours as the Vikings and Anglo-Saxons go head-to-head in close combat that leaves hundreds dead, but eventually Alfred prevails and the Viking host retreats eastward. The Battle of Ashdown is Alfred's first victory.

Timeline

849 CE

- **Birth of a warrior**
  Alfred is born in Wantage, Berkshire. He is the youngest son of King Aethelwulf and his first wife Osburh. Aethelwulf insists his children succeed to the throne in turn, making Alfred fifth in line.
  849 CE

- **Pilgrimage to Rome**
  Alfred goes on a pilgrimage to Rome where he is made a consul by the Pope. He also spends time in the court of Charles the Bald of the Franks where he learns about his greatest enemy: the Vikings.
  853 CE

- **Viking invasion**
  The Vikings launch an invasion of East Angles and much of the English mainland is taken by the Danish army. Alfred is made secundarius (advisor) to the king.
  865 CE

- **Marriage to Ealhswith**
  Alfred marries Ealhswith of Mercia as a way of showing solidarity against the invading Vikings. One account describes her as "the true and dear lady of the English."
  868 CE

- **Battle against Ivar the Boneless**
  Alfred and Aethelred fight the Viking host led by Ivar the Boneless in Mercia. Despite fierce fighting they cannot prevent the Vikings from crushing resistance wherever they find it.
  868 CE

- **Alfred is made heir apparent**
  In order to prevent a succession crisis in the face of the Viking invasion the reigning king, Aethelred, agrees that Alfred should be next in line to the throne despite Aethelred having children.
  January 871 CE

with one bold gesture. Rather than retreat, Alfred was determined to stand his ground; there could be no more defeat. He ordered his men to form an impregnable shield wall and as the Vikings crashed down onto them they were slaughtered on the shields and swords of the Anglo-Saxons. Alfred then led a charge into their camp at Chippenham and made "great slaughter among them" until they retreated into their fortress and were "brought to the extreme depths of despair." Trapped and starving, Guthrum was forced to surrender.

Guthrum and his Viking army retreated from Wessex for good but this did not mean they were out of England as a whole. The Vikings had established settlements in East Anglia and Northumbria and were becoming neighbours rather than raiders. Alfred saw this and in an act that showed his keen intellect he forced Guthrum to convert to Christianity and became his godfather. By doing this he ensured an oath of allegiance that would guarantee the stability of his kingdom. The Viking threat did not disappear after their defeat at Edington and as a warrior, Alfred knew that an attack on Wessex could happen at any time. He built up his defences and established a system of forts to help protect the countryside; he also instigated new laws based on the Bible, which consolidated his grip on power.

It is widely thought that Alfred suffered from Crohn's disease, which would explain his thin build and ongoing health problems

His most decisive act during the years after his victories was the consolidation of the rest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms under his leadership. Reasoning that one kingdom united was stronger and more able to resist foreign invasion than a divided land with divided interests, Alfred targeted London, the most important trading town in the whole of England. London was controlled by a Mercian King called Ceolwulf, who died at some point after 880, but Alfred's role in his death is unclear. Any involvement would have stained his reputation as England's 'darling' since London at the time was an Anglo-Saxon settlement. Whether London was captured or acquired, the city was brought under Alfred's control in 886. The symbolism of this act, along with his eldest daughter marrying Aethelred, the lord of the Mercians, united all of Anglo-Saxon England in a tenuous peace.

By 890, age had begun to creep up on Alfred. He suffered from crippling stomach pain and it was sapping his strength, along with the complexities of trying to rule a disparate group of settlements in his own kingdom and remain the most influential man in Mercia. Despite this, he continued building his realm by enlightening his subjects.

He translated a number of volumes from Latin to English, including *The Ecclesiastical History Of The English People* and Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, which instructed bishops on their duties. Alfred's contribution to the development of the English Church earned him such recognition that his most committed followers sought to get him canonised.

In 899, Alfred died aged 50, passing on a secure and powerful dynasty to his son Edward. The Anglo-Saxons would remain dominant in England for the next 167 years, until another great invasion in 1066 led to the investiture of a Norman king named William. Alfred had secured this legacy with his bravery, warrior skills and political savvy. Anglo-Saxons remembered him as 'England's shepherd, England's darling'; history honoured him with a far grander title – Alfred the Great.

A society divided

Kinship and lords

Anglo-Saxon society was dominated by bonds of honour and loyalty to kin groups in individual settlements around the country, and the tenuous fidelity these groups swore to the nobility and the king.

Invaded land

The Anglo-Saxons themselves were invaders of the British Isles. The Angle and Saxon tribes originated from Germany and Denmark and established settlements across England, subjugating the native Britons. In the time of Alfred, the Saxons had fully settled in Britain and were now under threat from the Vikings.

Language barrier

In many ways, the British Isles were a cosmopolitan collection of different tribes, all of whom spoke a number of languages and dialects. The Angle, Saxon, Norse, Celtic and Latin languages combined together during this period to form the base of what we now know as the English language.

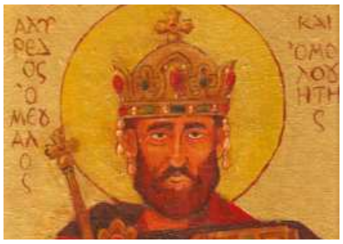
Divided religion

There was no dominant religion in Europe during this period. Christianity was becoming widespread but various forms of paganism still held sway in many lands, including the British and Scandinavian kingdoms. The Anglo-Saxons had converted to Christianity in 601 and referred to the Viking invasion as the 'heathen invasion.'

Warrior society

Every 'free' Anglo-Saxon male could be called upon to fight at any time by his lord in the fyrd or army. These groups would often be poorly equipped as individual warriors had to arm themselves, and it took strong leadership to keep these unruly bands together.

Crowned king
After the death of Aethelred, Alfred is crowned king of Wessex. Word is then received that the Vikings have won more victories within the kingdom. Instead of fighting them, Alfred strives for peace.
23 April 871 CE



Defining moment

Betrayed by Guthrum

January 878 CE

After a Viking incursion at Wareham in Dorset is defeated, the Viking chieftain Guthrum submits to Alfred and promises to withdraw his forces to Mercia. He seals his promise on a holy ring of the Viking god Odin. Instead of honouring his pledge to the warrior god, Guthrum betrays Alfred and escapes, reassembles his war host and destroys Alfred's army at Chippenham, forcing Alfred to flee into the countryside. The Anglo-Saxon chronicles speak of a dispirited, battle wary and lonely Alfred seeking shelter with peasants.

Defining moment

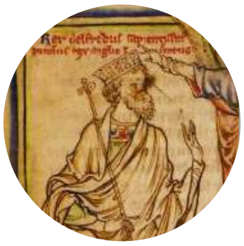
The Battle of Edington

May 878 CE

In the greatest battle of Alfred's career, he confronts his old enemy Guthrum for the last time on the field of battle. The battle is a desperate struggle for the survival of Alfred's kingdom. Much of Wessex is now under threat from the Viking horde assembled in the northern part of the kingdom. Alfred orders his men to form a dense shield wall, a common tactic used by Anglo-Saxon armies and together they hold firm against the Viking tide that sweeps onto them. He wins a spectacular victory and pursues the Vikings to Chippenham, where they surround and starve them out, forcing Guthrum to surrender.

Treaty of Wedmore
Alfred signs a peace treaty with Guthrum, which gives the Vikings control of East Anglia on the condition that Anglo-Saxon rights are fully respected and that the Vikings immediately stop taking slaves from Wessex townships.
878 CE

A gift of the true cross
In recognition of Alfred's true piety, Pope Marinus I presents a gift of what he believes to be a piece of the true cross, as well as other priceless treasures to Alfred and his court.
883 CE



London liberated
Alfred takes control of London through a disputed action which may have involved him laying siege to the area. He gains de facto dominance over all Anglo-Saxon territory by taking the most important trading city in the British Isles.
886 CE

The law codes
After studying Latin, Alfred presents to his kingdom a collection of laws put together in a 'dooms book' which is based on Christian teachings from the Bible. He uses these laws to strengthen his influence in the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.
893 CE

899 CE

Death of a hero
Alfred dies in 899 aged 50, ensuring a secure land for his lineage and Wessex as the dominant player of the three Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in England. He is remembered as Alfred the Great.
899 CE

© Alamy; Look and Learn

When Vikings ruled the waves

Portrayed as bloodthirsty pirates, pillaging innocent villagers, Vikings also ruled the waves with a lucrative trade network

> Contrary to modern preconceptions, Vikings had excellent hygiene, with many bathing at least once a week

The great white sail cracked as the vicious Atlantic wind lashed against it, but still the ship sailed on. Long and sleek, the warship, crafted from mighty oak, crashed through the waves, sending a sharp spray of water across the deck. The men inside rowed as one, their mighty muscles straining as they plunged the oars deep into the water and drove the ship forward through the turbulent waves. Their strength alone brought the ship to land and they poured out onto the beach. Dressed in thick woollen tunics, the warriors were armed with an array of weapons, from long sharpened spears to hefty battle-axes. With a booming voice one man yelled to the others, thrusting his sword into the air, and the rest bellowed in response. Then onward he ran, as the united force thundered uphill against the billowing wind. Their destination? A coastal monastery bursting full of gold, gems and hefty food supplies ripe for the taking, and only a collection of quiet, unassuming monks to protect it.

This image of monstrous invaders laying siege to innocent monasteries and pillaging them of their precious items is the first one that leaps to mind when many are confronted with the word 'Viking'. The portrayal of the Norse tribesmen as rapists and pillagers is so prevailing that it's often forgotten that the word Viking itself means to go on an expedition. It is easy to fall into the assumption that these people were nothing more than pirates - taking from those too weak to defend themselves. And it is undeniable that this happened: the Viking invaders sailed from Scandinavia to coasts of the British Isles and beyond, invading villages and monasteries, killing the inhabitants and stealing their riches. It's spoken about in first-hand accounts and it's still being evidenced today in the reams of Viking hoards discovered from anxious townsfolk who hurried to hide their riches from the merciless invaders.

However, this only tells half the story. Two things powered the Viking civilisation: the vicious raids they're famous for, and something else - trade. Not only did Vikings set up new colonies in the lands they invaded, but they also created powerful trade routes that helped their nation to become one of the most prosperous in the world.

For the majority of the year, the same Vikings who had pillaged the towns worked the land, tirelessly toiling in the field, or creating intricate and valuable ornaments and jewellery to fund their blossoming civilisation.

Vicious Vikings

Meet Scandinavia's most terrifying plunderers

Erik the Red 951 - 1003

Infamous for: Being exiled from Iceland for murder. He went on to colonise Greenland

Guthrum UNKNOWN - 890

Infamous for: Waging war against the king of the West Saxons - Alfred the great

Ingvar the Far-Travelled UNKNOWN

Infamous for: Pillaging the shores of the Caspian Sea

Rodulf Haraldsson UNKNOWN - 873

Infamous for: Leading raids in Britain, France and Germany

Ivar the Boneless UNKNOWN

Infamous for: Invading Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England using the Great Heathen Army

Viking voyages

As expert ship builders, the Vikings were able to voyage further and wider than any civilisation before...

Centuries before Christopher Columbus would stumble upon the land now known as America, the Vikings had claimed the Atlantic Ocean as their own backyard. They had mastered Russia's river system and reached the Middle East; their impressive voyages helped them to become leaders of a rapidly developing world and this new Viking civilisation thrived thanks to the power of a single creation: the ship.

The entire Viking society was built around their ships, which were bigger, lighter and faster than any before. These vessels had been perfected over many years, with the power to brave the vicious storms of the Atlantic Ocean, but also the sleek construction to skim through shallow rivers. These powerful and efficient ships enabled their mighty passengers to create colonies all over the world, and the building and maintaining of these vessels became the basis of Viking society.

Vikings were using their mighty sea power to trade around the coast of Europe while the British Empire was merely a collection of scattered kingdoms unable to defend their shores. The Viking sailors were aware that it was often easier to take the same journey by water rather than land, with some journeys taking five days by sea, compared to a month on land, and they used this to their advantage. Longer voyages were carried out by those settling in strange and exciting foreign lands, and the Viking civilisation spread to Iceland, Greenland, and even to Canada and North America.

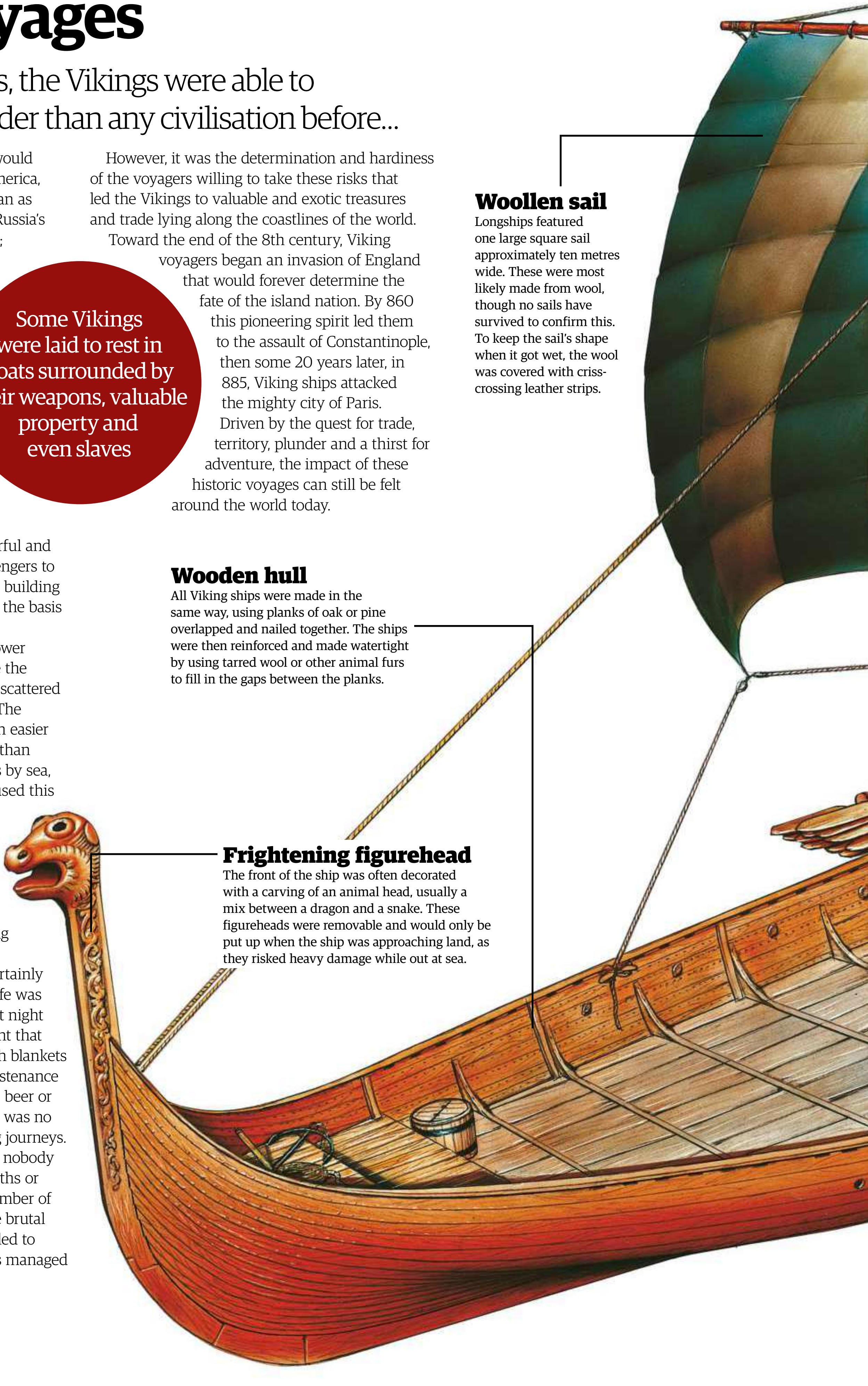
The image of a Viking longboat crashing through the waves with its fierce dragon figurehead and its long, sleek curves is certainly an inspiring one, but for those onboard, life was not quite so glamorous. With no shelter, at night the sailors used the sail as a makeshift tent that they would sleep under, shivering beneath blankets or animal skin sleeping bags. The only sustenance would be dried or salted meat with water, beer or sour milk to drink. The sinking of vessels was no great tragedy, but rather expected on long journeys. There would be no rescue sent as usually nobody knew about sunken ships for weeks, months or even years. It was not unusual for any number of ships to go missing on voyages across the brutal Atlantic Ocean. When Erik the Red travelled to Greenland, only 14 of his original 25 ships managed to arrive safely.

However, it was the determination and hardiness of the voyagers willing to take these risks that led the Vikings to valuable and exotic treasures and trade lying along the coastlines of the world.

Toward the end of the 8th century, Viking voyagers began an invasion of England that would forever determine the fate of the island nation. By 860 this pioneering spirit led them to the assault of Constantinople, then some 20 years later, in 885, Viking ships attacked the mighty city of Paris.

Driven by the quest for trade, territory, plunder and a thirst for adventure, the impact of these historic voyages can still be felt around the world today.

> Some Vikings were laid to rest in boats surrounded by their weapons, valuable property and even slaves



Woollen sail

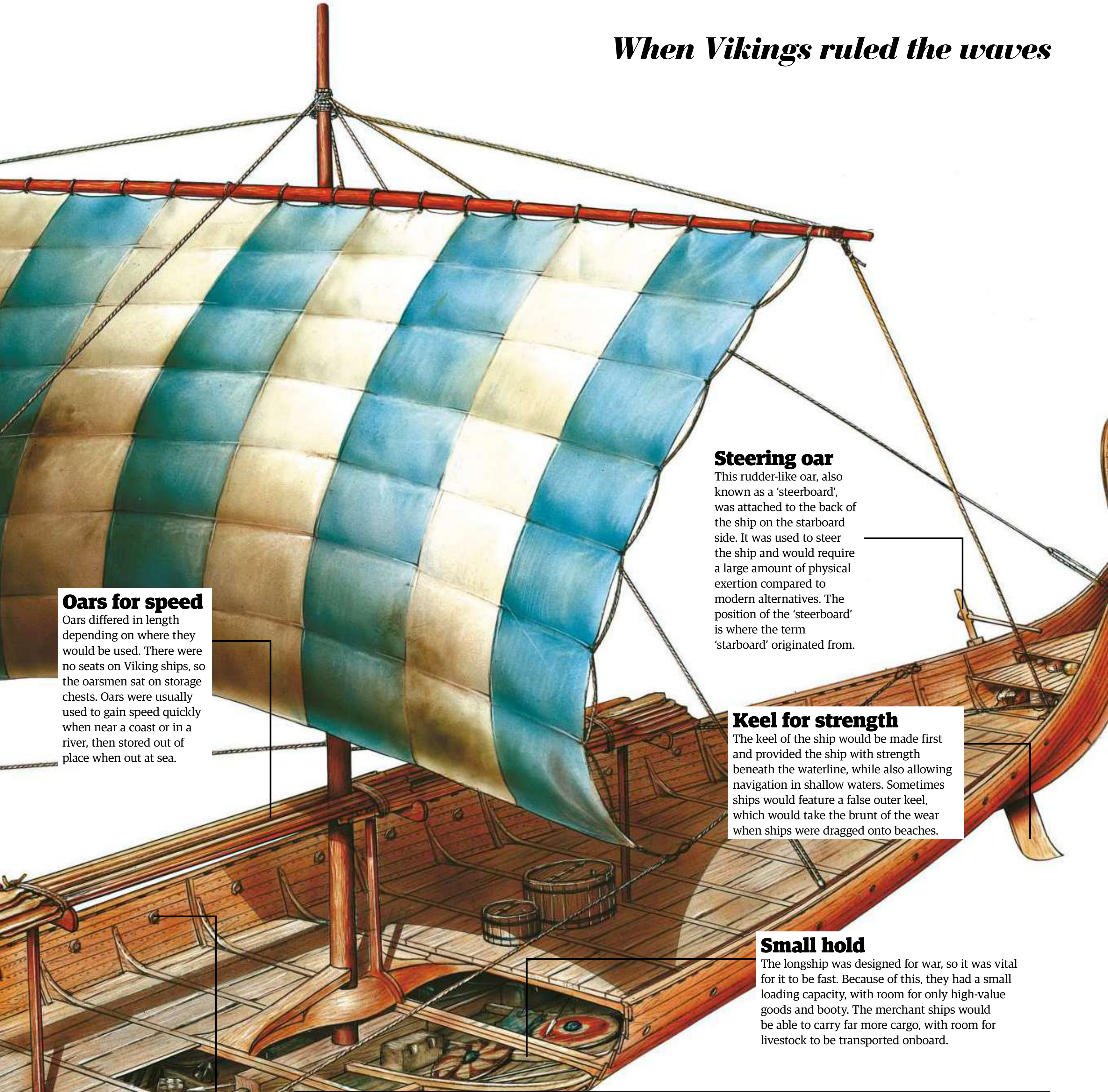
Longships featured one large square sail approximately ten metres wide. These were most likely made from wool, though no sails have survived to confirm this. To keep the sail's shape when it got wet, the wool was covered with criss-crossing leather strips.

Wooden hull

All Viking ships were made in the same way, using planks of oak or pine overlapped and nailed together. The ships were then reinforced and made watertight by using tarred wool or other animal furs to fill in the gaps between the planks.

Frightening figurehead

The front of the ship was often decorated with a carving of an animal head, usually a mix between a dragon and a snake. These figureheads were removable and would only be put up when the ship was approaching land, as they risked heavy damage while out at sea.



Oars for speed

Oars differed in length depending on where they would be used. There were no seats on Viking ships, so the oarsmen sat on storage chests. Oars were usually used to gain speed quickly when near a coast or in a river, then stored out of place when out at sea.

Steering oar

This rudder-like oar, also known as a 'steerboard', was attached to the back of the ship on the starboard side. It was used to steer the ship and would require a large amount of physical exertion compared to modern alternatives. The position of the 'steerboard' is where the term 'starboard' originated from.

Keel for strength

The keel of the ship would be made first and provided the ship with strength beneath the waterline, while also allowing navigation in shallow waters. Sometimes ships would feature a false outer keel, which would take the brunt of the wear when ships were dragged onto beaches.

Small hold

The longship was designed for war, so it was vital for it to be fast. Because of this, they had a small loading capacity, with room for only high-value goods and booty. The merchant ships would be able to carry far more cargo, with room for livestock to be transported onboard.

Oarports

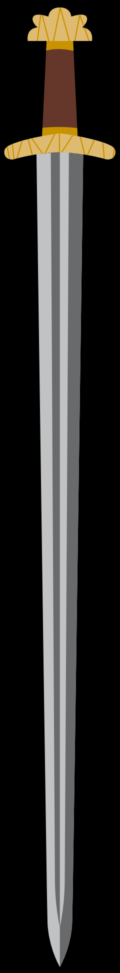
These were holes for the oars that ran along the entire length of the ship on both sides. The holes would also be used to tie shields in place, but only when the ships were in port as the risk of losing their vital protection while the ship was in motion was too great.

Navigation

Before some of the greatest explorers in history were born, Vikings had already navigated their way around the world. But with no compasses, satellites or radios, how did this tribe of Scandinavians manage to map the globe so impressively? The answer is simpler than you might expect – experience. Rather than relying on devices, Viking travellers trusted nature to guide them. They would study the position of the stars and Sun, and even the colour of the sea and movement of the waves would give them an indication of how close they were to land. Once a journey was complete, sailors would recount their voyage to others who wished to make the same journey. This ancient wisdom would be passed through generations.

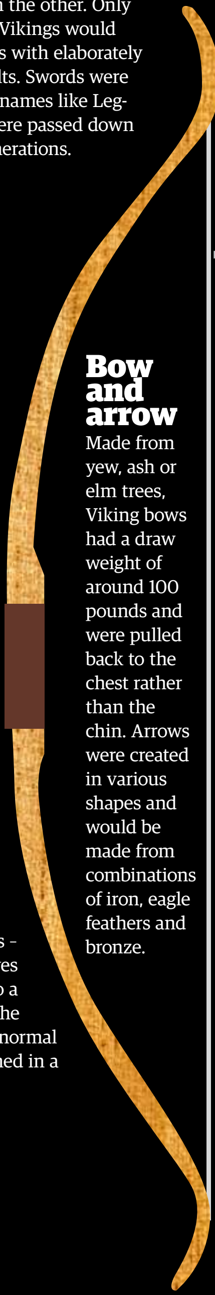
The only tools Viking sailors needed were related to the Sun. For example, a sun-shadow board would be used at noon to check whether the ship was on course. A sun-stone could also be used on foggy days when the Sun was not visible. This stone would change colour to indicate the position of the Sun behind the clouds.

Deadliest weapons



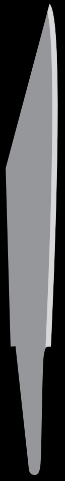
Sword

With blades up to 90cm long, swords were designed to be held in one hand, with the shield in the other. Only high-status Vikings would carry swords with elaborately designed hilts. Swords were often given names like Leg-biter, and were passed down through generations.



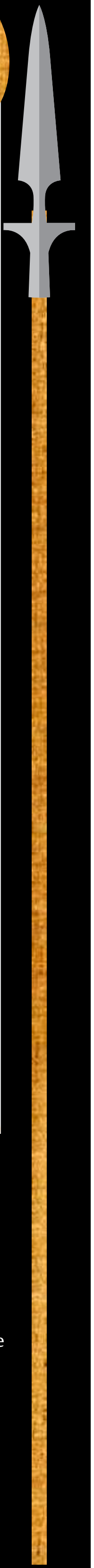
Bow and arrow

Made from yew, ash or elm trees, Viking bows had a draw weight of around 100 pounds and were pulled back to the chest rather than the chin. Arrows were created in various shapes and would be made from combinations of iron, eagle feathers and bronze.



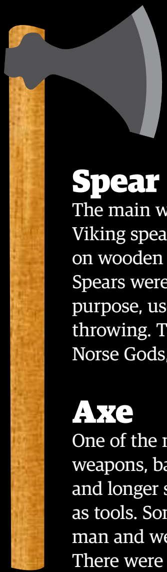
Knives

Vikings had two different types of knives - plain, single-edged knives and the seax - similar to a modern-day machete. The seax were heavier than normal knives and were fashioned in a 'broken-back' style.



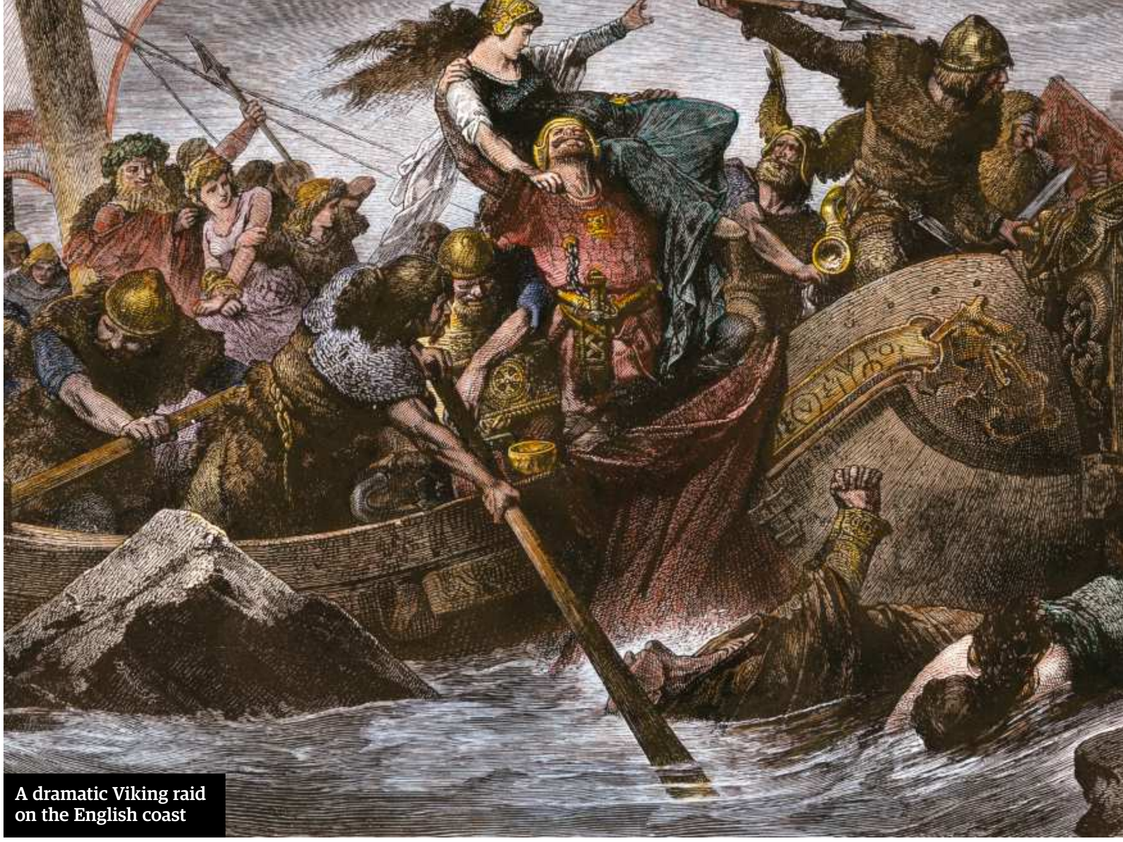
Spear

The main weapon of the peasant class, Viking spears had metal heads mounted on wooden shafts of two to three metres. Spears were designed according to their purpose, used for both thrusting and throwing. The weapon of Odin, king of the Norse Gods, it had great cultural meaning.



Axe

One of the most common Viking weapons, battle-axes had larger heads and longer shafts than the ones used as tools. Some axes were as long as a man and were wielded with both hands. There were also smaller throwing axes.



A dramatic Viking raid on the English coast

Raids

No monastery was safe from the fiery scourge that swept over the land from beyond the sea

They had arrived in the dead of night; the darkness had been so thick that the monks had not seen their ship until it landed on the shore. It was too late, they all knew it, to call for help. A brother had run into the halls, waking the monks from their beds with shrill cries of "The demons are here! They're coming! They're coming!" Some of the brothers began to scream for help, while others leapt into action, grabbing precious items and concealing them in the folds of their cloaks. But already the doors were down and already the invaders were here. They were huge - bigger than any man the humble brethren had ever seen - with their wild blond hair and mighty weapons grasped in hand. They leapt upon the monks immediately, hacking at their bodies with a frenzied ferocity. Some pleaded for mercy, some did not have time to plead. There was no time for negotiations; how can one negotiate with pure, unbridled violence? There was only death, destruction and blood as they swung their axes and jabbed their swords. One brother alone had managed to escape the massacre. He speedily weaved through the figures and threw himself down into the tall grass outside. He watched as body after body was thrown from the doors of his home; he watched as men still alive were cast off the high cliff into the sea; and he watched as the heathens set the holy walls alight with flame. The hot wind lashed against his face and robes in the flickering darkness. He grasped a golden chalice in his hands numbly, the only thing he had been able to rescue before fleeing. The invaders had the rest of it, all the precious items loaded into sacks on their large ships. And almost as quickly as they had arrived, they slipped away from the shore and returned to the darkness.

In 793, a Viking crew sailing near northeast England raided a Christian monastery at Lindisfarne. For the Vikings the strange, exposed building packed full of valuable treasures was an opportunity too good to miss, but for many in England this shocking and unprovoked attack marked the beginning of the scourge of Viking raids. These sporadic but violent assaults continued across the coasts of England, and by 855 a force known as the Great Heathen Army had arrived in East Anglia. The army made their way across the country, capturing cities as they went, overrunning and overpowering the land. The Scandinavian warriors also launched invasions across the coasts of Ireland and all over mainland Europe. These raids even stretched to the Baltic Sea and Persia. The initial reasons for such rapid expansion are hotly contested between historians, with some believing the raids were a brutal response to the spread of Christianity, that the Scandinavian population had grown too large for their land, or perhaps they were the actions of men simply drawn by the thrill of adventure. Whatever the reasons, the invasions left a lasting scar on those who lived to see them.

Blond was a popular hair colour among Viking men, and they would often bleach their hair and beards

How the Vikings raided

1 Preparation

Vikings did not strike haphazardly; their raids were planned down to the finest detail. They would first identify a weak target to attack along the coasts, which they knew perfectly. Because they had the fastest ships in the world they would launch their attack without any prior warning, ensuring that no help could reach their targets in time. Towards the mid-9th century these attacks had escalated to great fleets of 300-400 ships.

2 Gather horses

Viking ships were designed to row up river, but if the target was some distance away they would leave their ships and travel by horse. With no horses on the ships, they would raid nearby villages for mounts. These would be used to transport themselves and their booty over land.

3 Surprise attack

The pious and humble monks did not stand a chance faced with their fierce opponents armed with superior weapons. The well-trained Vikings would launch a sudden, vicious attack on the monastery, slaying the holy men. Some would be stripped naked, and cast outside, some taken prisoner, and others thrown into the sea.

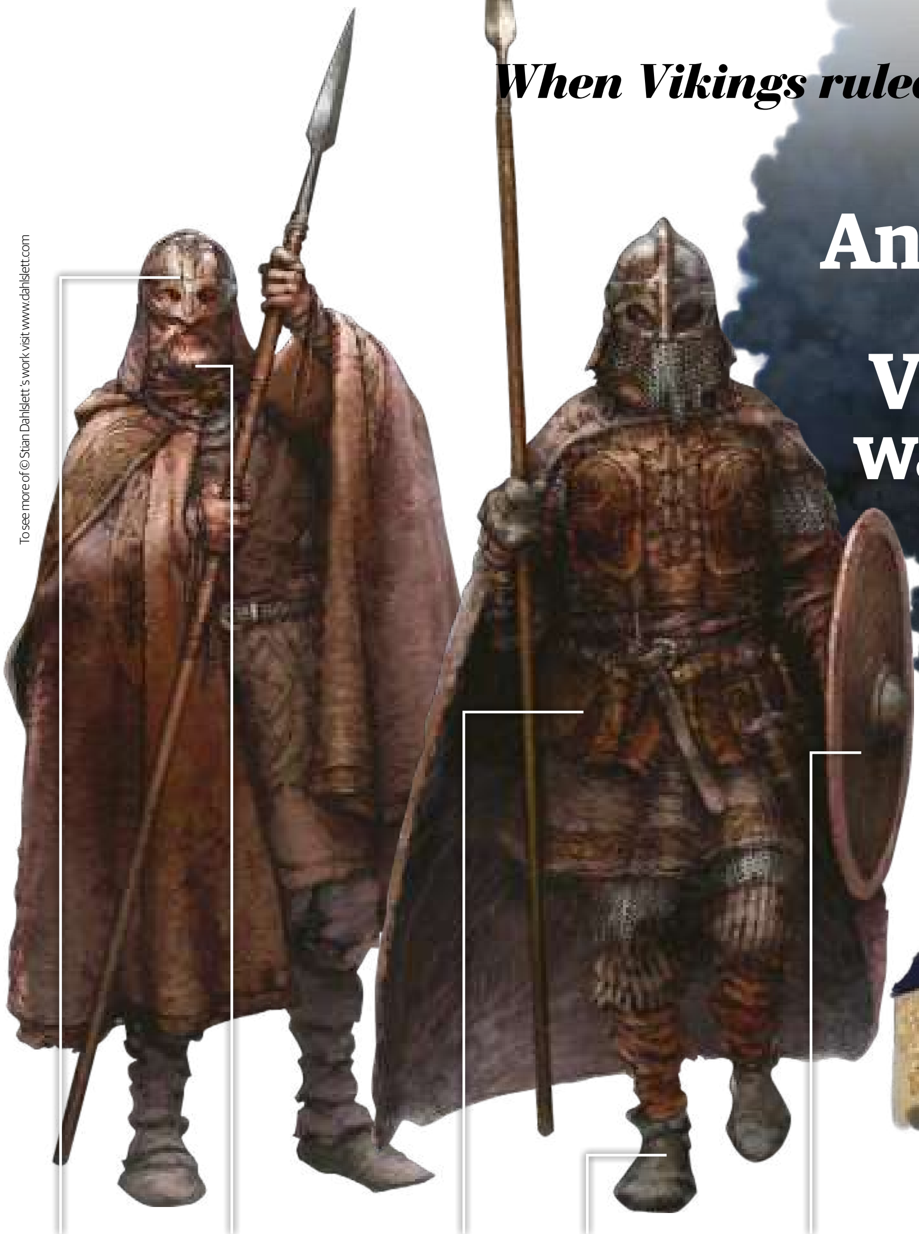
4 Loot and burn

Once the monks were dealt with, Vikings pillaged at will. They plundered any valuables they could get their hands on, including food, but especially precious relics. However, they often ignored the valuable bibles. Once they had looted the buildings they set fire to the monasteries and the surrounding villages.

5 Escape

Laden down with their prisoners and booty, the Vikings would ride back to their ships, load them and sail away. They would later sell the gold, jewels and sacred emblems, and the monks would also fetch a high price in the European slave market.

Anatomy of a Viking warrior



To see more of © Stan Dahlslett's work visit www.dahlslett.com

Helmet
Vikings did not, in fact, have horned helmets. Instead, they were round with a guard around the eyes and nose. There is only one complete Viking helmet in existence - others may have been passed down through families then sold for scrap.

Hair
Long hair was favoured by both men and women. It would also be acceptable to shave one's hair or to wear it rolled in a tight bun near the nape of their neck. Men would also carefully groom their moustaches and beards.

Armour
Mail shirts or metal armour would have been expensive for the average raider, as would leather, so these were reserved only for those of high status. Ordinary Vikings likely fought wearing their everyday clothes, made from wool.

Shoes
Shoes were most often made from one long piece of leather sewn to the shape of the wearer's foot. Leather straps would be used to secure the boot to the foot, and thick woollen socks were worn to keep heat in.

Shield
Round shields were common and were made from light wood, such as fir or poplar and were reinforced with leather or iron around the edge. Round shields could get as large as 120cm in diameter, but most were around 75 to 90cm.

Lindisfarne priory remains a place of pilgrimage to this day

The attack on Lindisfarne

Lindisfarne is a holy island off the northeast coast of England, and during the Middle Ages was the base of Christian evangelising in the north of the country. However, in 793 a Viking raid on the monastery of Lindisfarne sent a wave of dismay washing over Christians worldwide. On 7 June, Viking raiders invaded the monastery and "destroyed God's church on Lindisfarne, with plunder and slaughter." Although the attack was not the first in the country, it was unusual in that it attacked the heart of the Christian nation in the north. A contemporary scholar wrote of the attack, "Never before has such terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race […] The heathens poured out the blood of saints around the altar, and trampled on the bodies of saints in the temple of God, like dung in the streets."

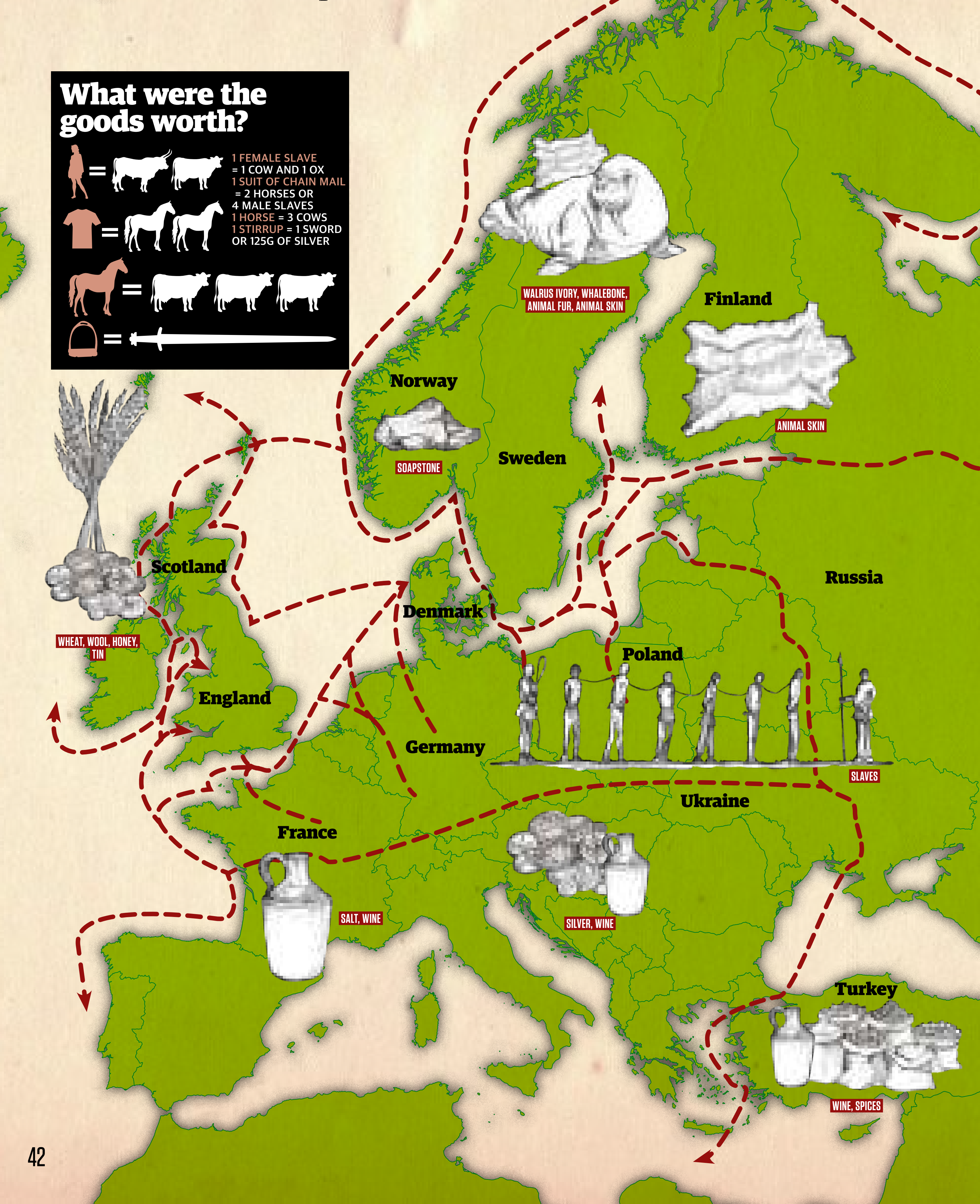
What were the goods worth?

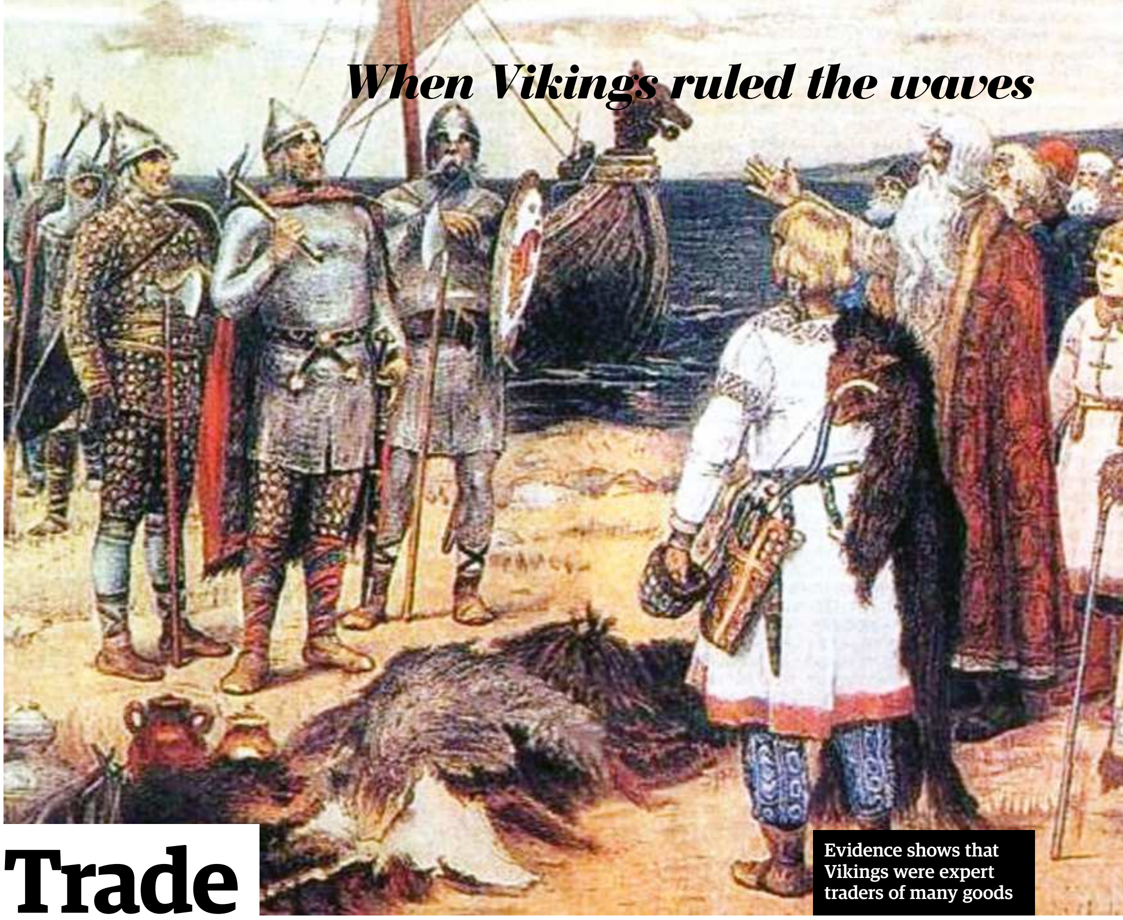
1 FEMALE SLAVE = 1 COW AND 1 OX

1 SUIT OF CHAIN MAIL = 2 HORSES OR 4 MALE SLAVES

1 HORSE = 3 COWS

1 STIRRUP = 1 SWORD OR 125G OF SILVER


WALRUS IVORY, WHALEBONE, ANIMAL FUR, ANIMAL SKIN
Finland
Norway
Sweden
ANIMAL SKIN
SOAPSTONE
Scotland
WHEAT, WOOL, HONEY, TIN
Denmark
Russia
Poland
England
Germany
SLAVES
Ukraine
France
SALT, WINE
SILVER, WINE
Turkey
WINE, SPICES



Evidence shows that Vikings were expert traders of many goods

Trade

Vikings were not powered by brutality but instead a complex and prosperous trade network

Although raiding and pillaging provided a quick intake of wealth, it was not a stable way to live or to build a civilisation. Instead, the Vikings dedicated far more of their time to building up a prosperous and powerful trading network. Because of their superior ship-building skills they were able to travel to trade in faraway lands, obtaining a host of exotic and valuable goods. Their specially designed trading ships were able to carry up to 35 tonnes of cargo, including silver and even livestock.

Trading markets began to emerge along the west Baltic Sea in the mid-8th century where people came from far and wide to trade an array of goods. As these markets flourished, traders decided to settle permanently along the routes and they transformed into trading towns. Birka in Sweden, Kaupang in Norway and Hedeby in Denmark all grew to be prosperous and bustling trading settlements, with the inhabitants all working as craftsmen and merchants. Prosperous trading routes also emerged along the British Isles, with York and Dublin developing into major trading centres.

> Viking wedding celebrations were huge occasions in a community, and could last for well over a week

As the trade boom increased the Vikings travelled further afield, across the Baltic Sea and along the Russian rivers. They founded more trading towns in Kiev and Novgorod. The Viking traders even went as far as Istanbul, the capital of the mighty Byzantine Empire across the Black Sea. This perilous journey was one only the Vikings dared attempt, through vicious rapids and battling hostile natives. The Vikings continued their trading journey inland, bringing their goods to Jerusalem and Baghdad. The lure of the Silk Road and the exotic riches of the East were too good to resist, and Vikings met with traders from the Far East in their trading centres in Russia, trading fur and slaves for silk and spices.

Silver coins were the most common form of payment, but this was unlike today's currency where different coins are worth a particular value. The coins were weighed in scales to determine their value; this is because a lot of coins were melted down and crafted into intricate and beautiful jewellery to trade on. The great extent of the Viking trade network can be seen today in the hoards of silver coins, created in England, which have been found in Sweden, not to mention the 40,000 Arabic coins and the 38,000 German coins also uncovered there. Nordic bowls, Mediterranean silk and Baltic axe heads have even been discovered buried under English soil.

This vast and illustrious trade network attracted a wealth of eager and talented artists and craftsmen. Viking bead-makers would import glass from Western Europe to create an array of simple and decorative beads for the wealthy to adorn themselves with, while the ample supply of amber from the Baltic lands was fashioned into pendants and playing pieces. Skilled Viking craftsmen transformed their imported bronze to fine ornaments and mass-produced brooches, and deer antlers could even be used to make delicate and beautiful combs.

© Sol 90 Images; Abigail Daker; Alamy

Raiders or traders?

Stuart Perry, or Fastulf Geraltsson as he is known to the public, is the Jorvik Group's Interactive Team Leader. He manages a team of Viking interactives at Jorvik Viking Centre and archaeology and history interpreters across the group's five attractions

What was the motivation behind the Viking invasions? Were they simply bloodthirsty raiders, or did they have more civilised aims?

The motivation behind the Viking invasions was simple; farmland. The Vikings, or Norsemen – which is a more accurate name since a 'Viking' was a sea-borne raider that specialised in hit-and-run attacks – were searching for land.

Scandinavia is not rich in arable land – there is simply too much water and too many mountainous regions to support a population over a certain size. The Vikings had been raiding the coast of England since 793 – the famous attack on Lindisfarne – and would have had plenty of opportunity to see the abundance of good farmland, healthy crops and fat cattle all over the country. Combine this with the riches presented in the monasteries and towns they were so fond of raiding and England became a perfect area for expansion.

As for being 'bloodthirsty raiders', there is that element to the culture, yes, but it was not simply for violence that the Vikings went raiding. It was for profit. Rarely would the Vikings destroy an entire settlement, and the reason is simple; they wanted to come back and do it again! Raiding was a job for young impetuous men – but it was not the main focus of life in early Medieval Scandinavia. It is this message that we convey at every opportunity here at Jorvik Viking Centre.

SILVER
SILK, SILVER, SPICES

William the Conqueror

Discover how incredible battlefield courage and brutal treatment of his enemies led the bastard of Normandy to become king of England

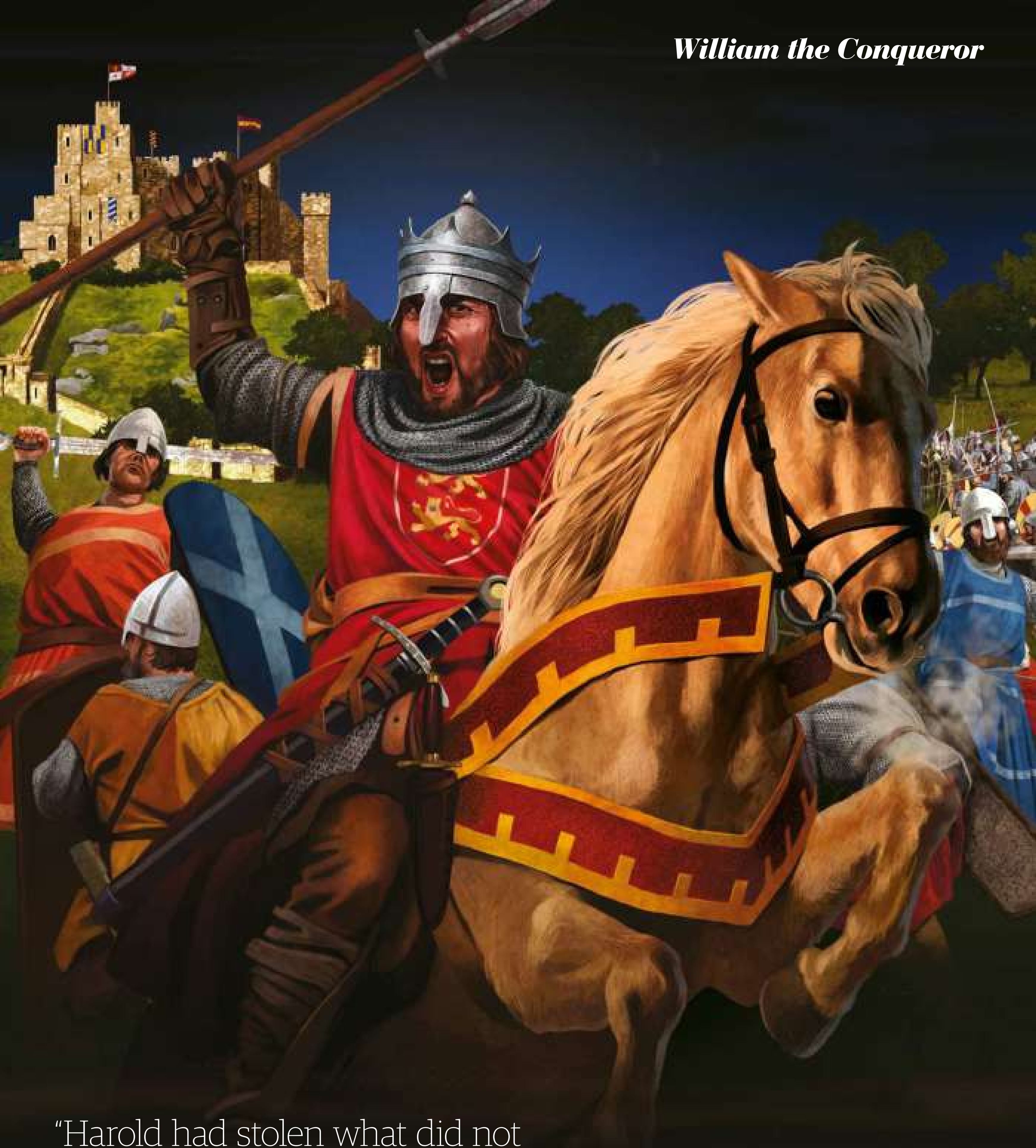
On 5 January 1066, King Edward the Confessor of England passed away without a true heir. Upon his deathbed, the dying ruler had bequeathed his throne to the most powerful man in the kingdom, Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex. The day after the king's death, Harold received the acceptance of the English magnates in London and was crowned. When word travelled across the Channel to the mainland and reached one of the most powerful nobles of northern France, he flew into a rage. William, Duke of Normandy, believed he was next in the line of succession to the English throne. Harold had stolen what did not belong to him, so as the rightful heir, the duke would do whatever it took to claim what was his; thus, he would become William the Conqueror.

> The Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts William's conquest of England, is 50 centimetres tall and almost 70 metres long

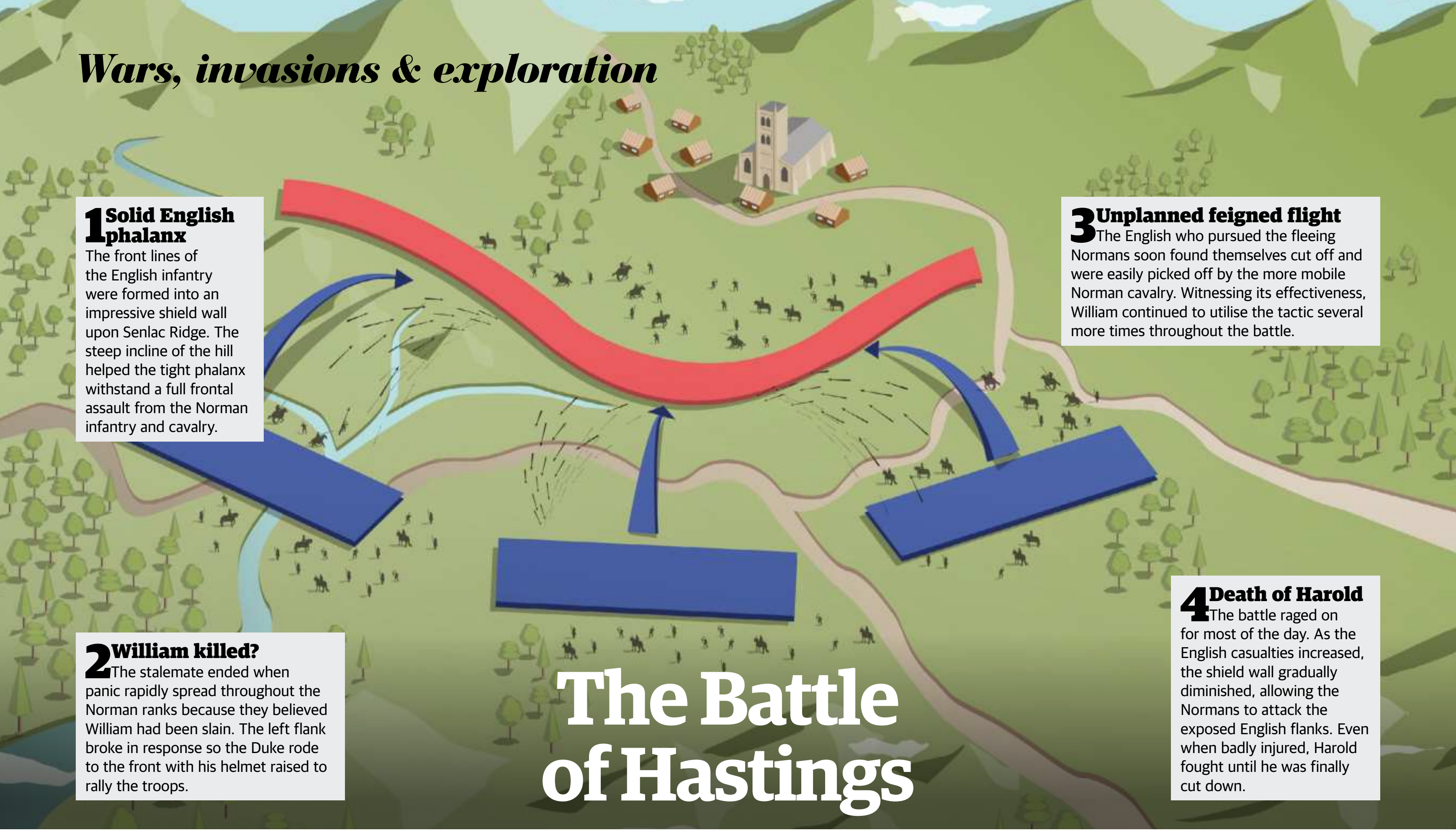
40 years earlier in 1026, Count Robert of the Hiémois, William's father, looked out the window of his room at Falaise Castle to see a young woman below walking alongside the River Ante. Struck by her beauty, the count ordered his servants to bring the maiden to his bedroom that night. Her name was Herleva, the daughter of a lower-class tanner. Even if the stories were true that the count fell deeply in love with her, Herleva never became more than a concubine to Robert.

However, their relationship became much more complicated the following year on 5 August when Duke Richard III of Normandy suddenly became ill and died. As Richard's younger brother, Robert acted quickly to seize the duchy. With the support of several powerful Norman magnates, it did not take long before he became Duke Robert I. Around the same time, Herleva found out she was with child. By the end of 1028, William, the bastard son of the new duke, was born. Since Herleva was a commoner, Robert could not marry his mistress. Therefore, the duke did not immediately recognise his son, so William spent his first years at his mother's home in Guibray. Although still unwilling to make Herleva his wife, Robert eventually gave her proper respect by arranging her marriage to minor noble Herluin de Conteville. She was given even more honour when her son was proclaimed as the duke's legitimate heir; yet, this also meant that William was separated from his mother at a very young age and brought to live with his father at the castle of Falaise.

At the age of seven, William endured another traumatic experience when his father died while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1035. Luckily for William, Robert cleverly took the precaution to have his nobles accept his son as the ducal heir to Normandy before he left on his journey. Yet the latest duke was still deprived of his parents for the most part, with little contact with his mother, which would have left a major impression upon his childhood. Robert also appointed several close relatives, trusted advisors and loyal companions to take care of William and run the kingdom in his absence. These men, such as William's great uncle Robert, the Archbishop of Rouen, gladly fulfilled their roles and when it became clear that Duke Robert was



“Harold had stolen what did not belong to him, so as the rightful heir, the duke would do whatever it took to claim what was his”



The Battle of Hastings

1 Solid English phalanx
The front lines of the English infantry were formed into an impressive shield wall upon Senlac Ridge. The steep incline of the hill helped the tight phalanx withstand a full frontal assault from the Norman infantry and cavalry.

2 William killed?
The stalemate ended when panic rapidly spread throughout the Norman ranks because they believed William had been slain. The left flank broke in response so the Duke rode to the front with his helmet raised to rally the troops.

3 Unplanned feigned flight
The English who pursued the fleeing Normans soon found themselves cut off and were easily picked off by the more mobile Norman cavalry. Witnessing its effectiveness, William continued to utilise the tactic several more times throughout the battle.

4 Death of Harold
The battle raged on for most of the day. As the English casualties increased, the shield wall gradually diminished, allowing the Normans to attack the exposed English flanks. Even when badly injured, Harold fought until he was finally cut down.

never going to return, they continued to do so until William came of age.

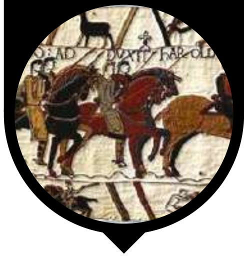
Yet it was surprising that Duke William survived his adolescence. Archbishop Robert managed to effectively rule the dukedom until his death in 1037. Afterward, Normandy devolved into anarchy as the aristocracy exploited the minority of the duke to carry out blood feuds with rival families, increase their lands or even plot to remove William to claim the duchy as their own. Many of the latter group were members of the duke's own family, known as Richardides for their descent from the Norman Duke Richard I. Because of this ancestry, several of the Richardides believed their claim to the ducal throne was much greater than that of 'William the Bastard'.

As William matured, he was surrounded by violence as several of his guardians were murdered. In late-May 1042, the duke slept in the castle of Vaudreuil. To protect the duke, William's steward, Osbern, lay beside him. Neither of them woke as an assassin crept into the room and stood over their bed. William woke to find the throat of his guardian slit open. As the young duke grew accustomed to the deaths of those closest to him, he himself managed to survive unharmed.

In 1046 and 1047, William faced the greatest threat to his life yet as the Richardides carried out a full-blown rebellion. However, the young duke acted quickly and effectively. William not only gathered his loyal vassals, but also reached out to his lord, King Henry I of France, and appealed for his help. Before long, William and Henry gathered a large enough force to confront the rebel army. At the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047, the King of France crushed the Norman dissidents, but William would continue to suppress minor revolts for the next three years.

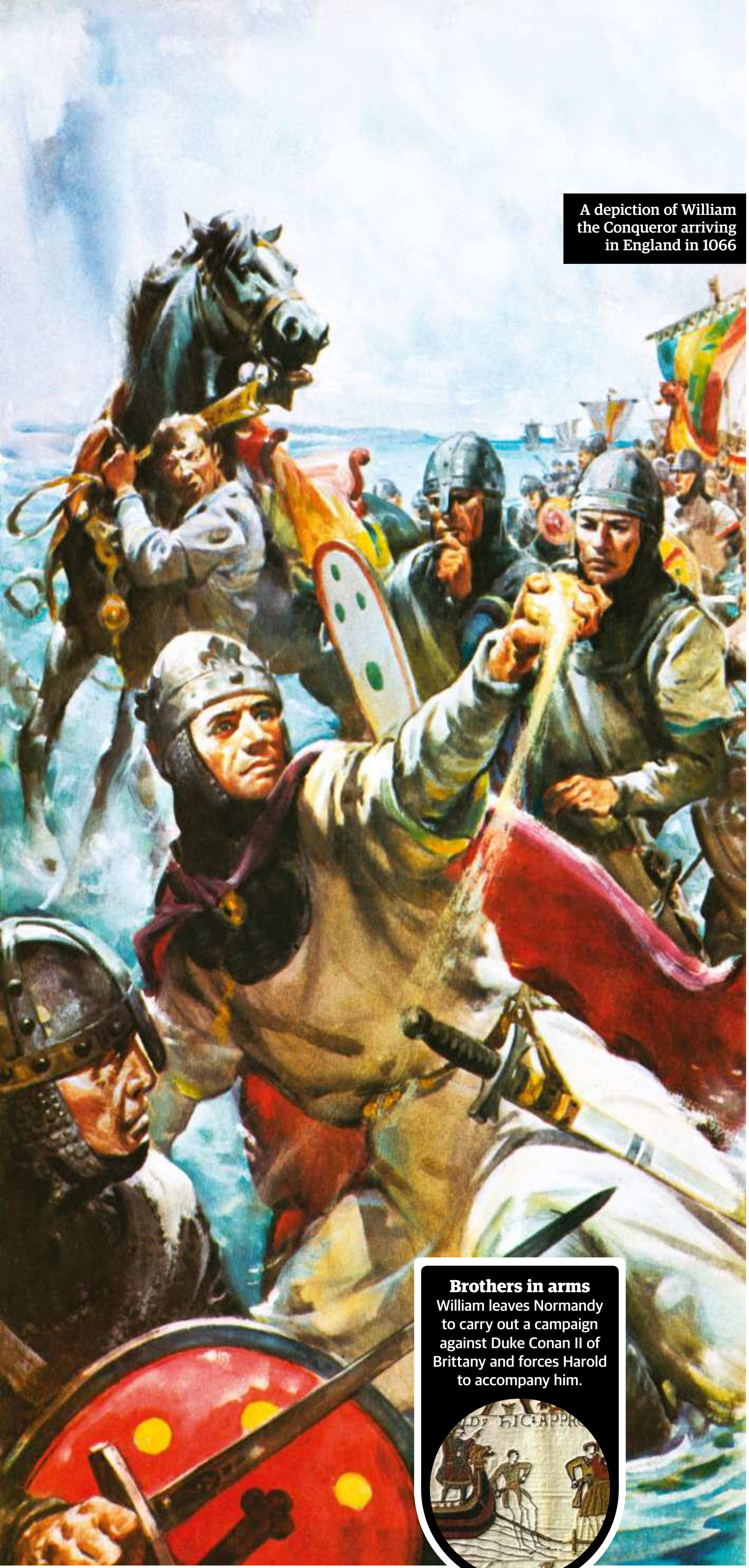
By the early-1050s, William was in his twenties and had not required the supervision of a regent for some time. Free to act with full ducal authority, William quelled rebellions throughout Normandy and then began to look outward. This brought him into conflict not only with the formidable count of Anjou, Geoffrey II Martel, but also with King Henry, who began to fear the growing power of the young duke. Throughout the violent clashes William participated in at home and abroad, the duke quickly began to build a reputation as a fierce warrior capable of leading rapid assaults and laying effective sieges. In addition, tales of the brutality inflicted on those who crossed him spread terror among his enemies.

The prisoner
When William demands Count Guy hand over Harold into his custody, the count obeys him and delivers the English noble to Castle Eu.



One of the most horrific instances of William's vengeance took place at Alençon in 1052. After his failed surprise assault on the town, the defenders on the wall yelled down insults about his illegitimate birth and beat animal skins with sticks to mock the fact his grandfather was a tanner. Once he managed to break into the town, William captured 36 of the men and punished them by ordering for all of their feet and hands to be severed. For the rest of his reign, William continued to order similar mutilations carried out on his worst enemies, however, his favoured punishment was imprisonment for several years; many times even for life.

Although nothing can excuse the terrible actions of the duke, his bravery in war and deep devotion to his close friends and family allowed him to attract numerous loyal followers. When his younger half-brothers, the sons of his mother, reached the proper age, William gave them land and prestigious titles. Odo became the bishop of Bayeux, while Robert was made the count of Mortain. Both men became staunch supporters of William and, together with other trustworthy lieutenants like Roger II of Montgomery and William FitzOsbern, they formed a tight-knit group around the duke who helped him greatly to achieve his goals. Yet the most important relationship of the duke was with his wife Matilda, daughter of Count Baldwin V of Flanders. At first, the union was a mere strategic



A depiction of William the Conqueror arriving in England in 1066

Brothers in arms
William leaves Normandy to carry out a campaign against Duke Conan II of Brittany and forces Harold to accompany him.

Contenders for the throne

Harold Godwinson

Earl of Wessex

Harold was a powerful English magnate. He was present while Edward lay on his deathbed and bequeathed his throne to Harold. The Witan of Anglo-Saxon nobles accepted his coronation.

William

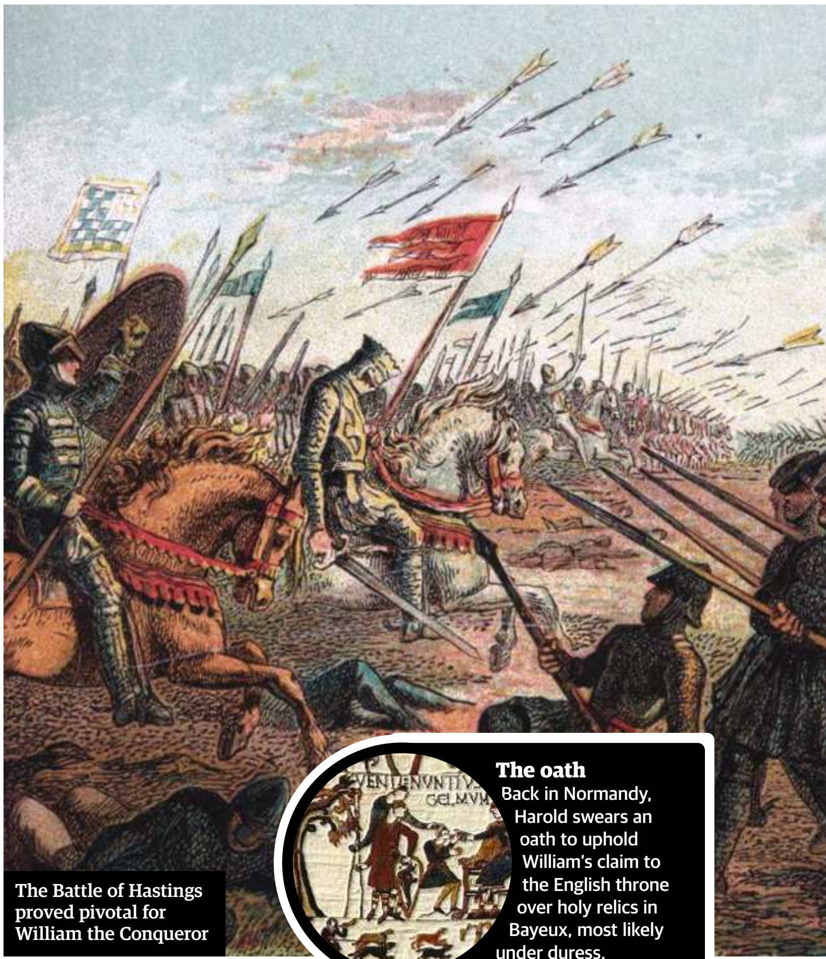
Duke of Normandy

Before Edward the Confessor became king in 1042, he lived in exile at the court of the dukes of Normandy. To show his appreciation, he supposedly promised to leave the throne to William.

Harald Hardrada

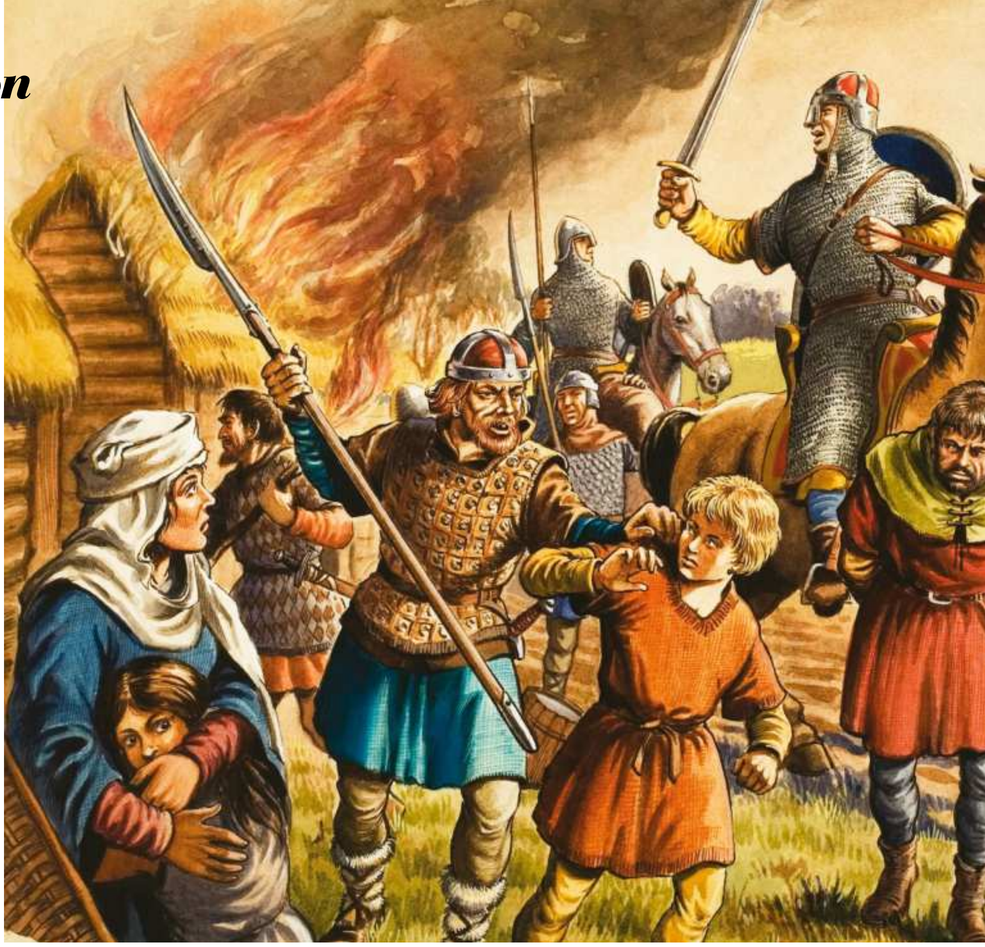
King of Norway

The Norwegian king had the weakest claim and was merely attempting to exploit a great opportunity to further his wealth and prestige through the conquest of prosperous England.



The Battle of Hastings proved pivotal for William the Conqueror

The oath
Back in Normandy, Harold swears an oath to uphold William's claim to the English throne over holy relics in Bayeux, most likely under duress.



6 ways William changed Europe

1 The conquest of England strengthened the bond between the British Isles and the mainland considerably, especially in religious institutions.

2 The effectiveness of knights at the Battle of Hastings and the domination by Norman armies led to an increased use of cavalry in England.

3 William introduced the English to the advanced continental castles by constructing many of his own to help his army occupy the country.

4 William's gradual but effective purge of nearly all Anglo-Saxon secular and lay magnates led to an almost entirely Norman aristocracy in England.

5 The Norman process of rebuilding the religious structures of England created a unique Anglo-Norman style for most local churches.

6 In one of his many tense conflicts with the papacy, William successfully defended the rights of Norman dukes to select their own bishops.

alliance with one of the most powerful magnates of northern France. However, over time the couple fell deeply in love. William remained completely devoted to her for the rest of his life and even trusted her with some of the most important positions in his lands.

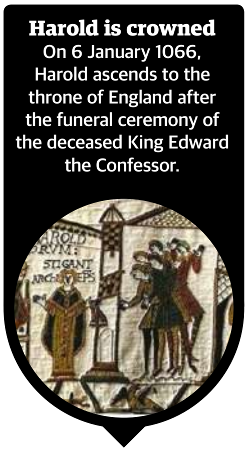
The increasing power of Duke William led to the joint invasion of Normandy by his two major rivals, Count Geoffrey and King Henry, in 1053. Divided in two, the invasion forces failed utterly as one army was defeated at Mortemer and the other retreated in response. The rivals made another attempt in 1057, but William crushed the allied army at the Battle of Varaville. Within a few years the campaigns ceased, for both Henry and Geoffrey died. With his main adversaries gone and stability finally reached within his duchy, William was no longer forced to defend his lands and was free to go on the offensive.

Shortly after the death of Count Herbert II of Maine on 9 March 1062, William led his first major conquest over the deceased magnate's territory. The duke claimed that Herbert had named him as his heir to the county so from that justification, William claimed the land of a vassal of his enemy, the count of Anjou, by 1064. Two years later, the duke made similar statements to justify the conquest of a much greater prize than the county of Maine.

In either 1064 or 1065, Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, crossed the English Channel and accidentally landed in the territory of Count Guy of Ponthieu. Guy ordered his men to capture the wealthy Anglo-Saxon noble and imprisoned him, along with his retinue, in the castle of Beaurain. Once word reached William of Harold's condition, the duke immediately seized the opportunity. William forced his vassal, Guy, to release Harold and bring the English earl to him. Once in his custody, William did all he could to manipulate Harold into helping him attain his most ambitious prize, the throne of England.

As a child, the king of England, Edward the Confessor, was forced to flee his country and live as an exile in the Norman court of his uncle, Duke Richard II. Danish King Cnut invaded England in 1016 and eventually claimed the English crown, removing Edward's family from the succession. Then in 1042, Edward was allowed to return home and regain his birthright, the throne of England. A major reason for the king's return was the support given to him by the powerful Godwin family of Wessex. In gratitude, the new king bestowed lands and titles upon Harold and his brother; this alliance was then strengthened considerably in January 1045, when Edward married Harold's sister Edith, thus making the two men brothers-in-law. Since Edward had family connections and owed huge debts to both William and Harold, both men believed they should be the primary heirs of the old king who had no heir.

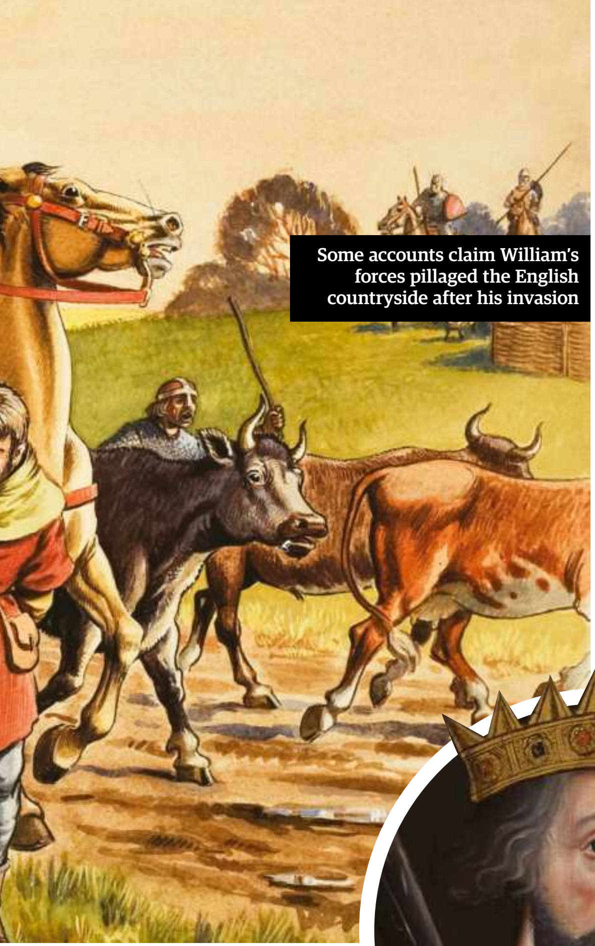
Harold is crowned
On 6 January 1066, Harold ascends to the throne of England after the funeral ceremony of the deceased King Edward the Confessor.



With Harold held hostage, William attempted to use a combination of flattery and threats to get the English magnate to not only accept his claim, but also help him attain the English throne upon the death of the ageing Edward. Therefore, Harold accompanied William on his invasion of Brittany in 1064, and when they returned to Normandy, Harold swore an oath of fealty to William. Certain he had achieved his goal, William let the Earl of Wessex return to his island.

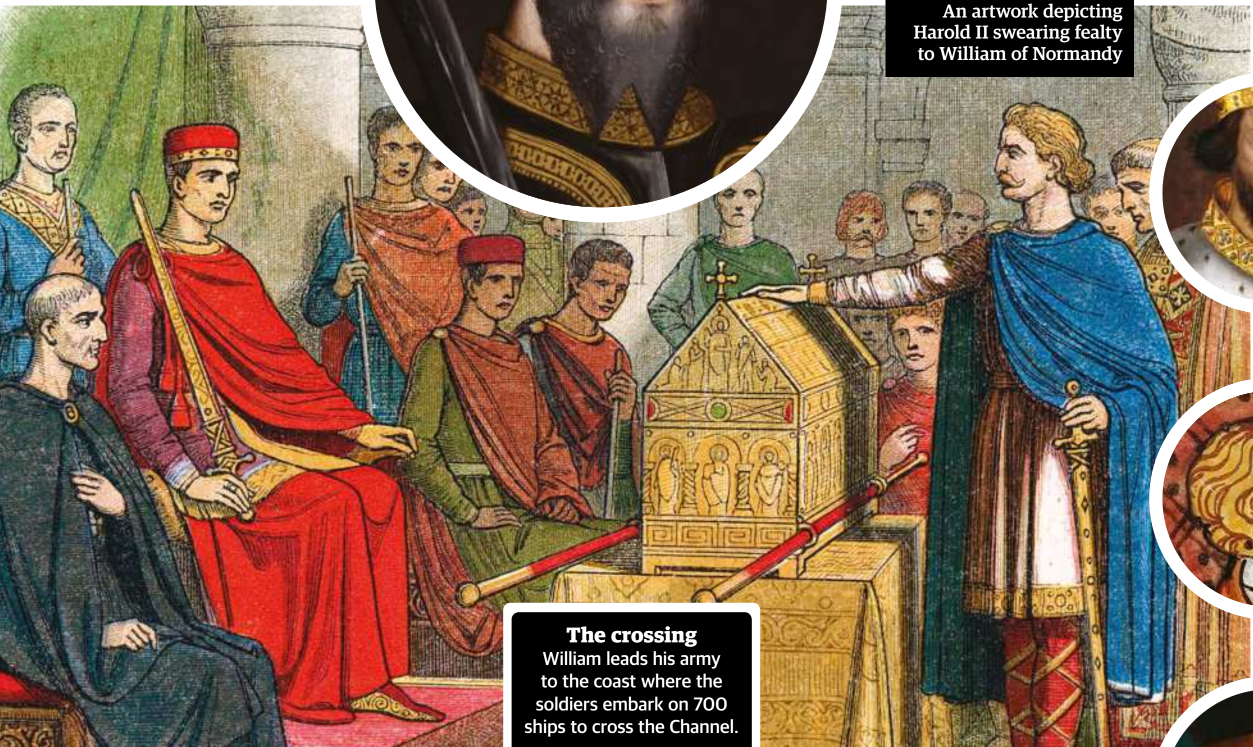
Upon Edward's death, it became clear that Harold made his oath to William under duress and thus considered it completely invalid. He also quickly cemented his claim to the throne with the support of several witnesses to Edward naming Harold as his heir, along with earning the election of the Witan, a council of English nobles. The English may have accepted King Harold II, but William did not. William was certain that he had promised the throne to him; he would not forget that fact, nor would he let the English.

The situation looked bleak for Harold later in 1066. While William gathered a large invasion force and enormous fleet of 700 ships, King Harald Hardrada of Norway decided to exploit the vulnerability of England and invade as well. However, Harold and his Anglo-Saxon army managed to crush the Norwegians on 25 September at the



Some accounts claim William's forces pillaged the English countryside after his invasion

Built in 1068, Warwick Castle still stands tall today



An artwork depicting Harold II swearing fealty to William of Normandy

The crossing
William leads his army to the coast where the soldiers embark on 700 ships to cross the Channel.

French continental rivals

Henry I
King of France

After helping William keep control over his duchy at the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047, Henry soon became threatened by the new duke's growing power. The king led two unsuccessful invasions of Normandy in 1053-4 and 1057 to try and subdue his rival.

Fulk IV le Réchin
Count of Anjou

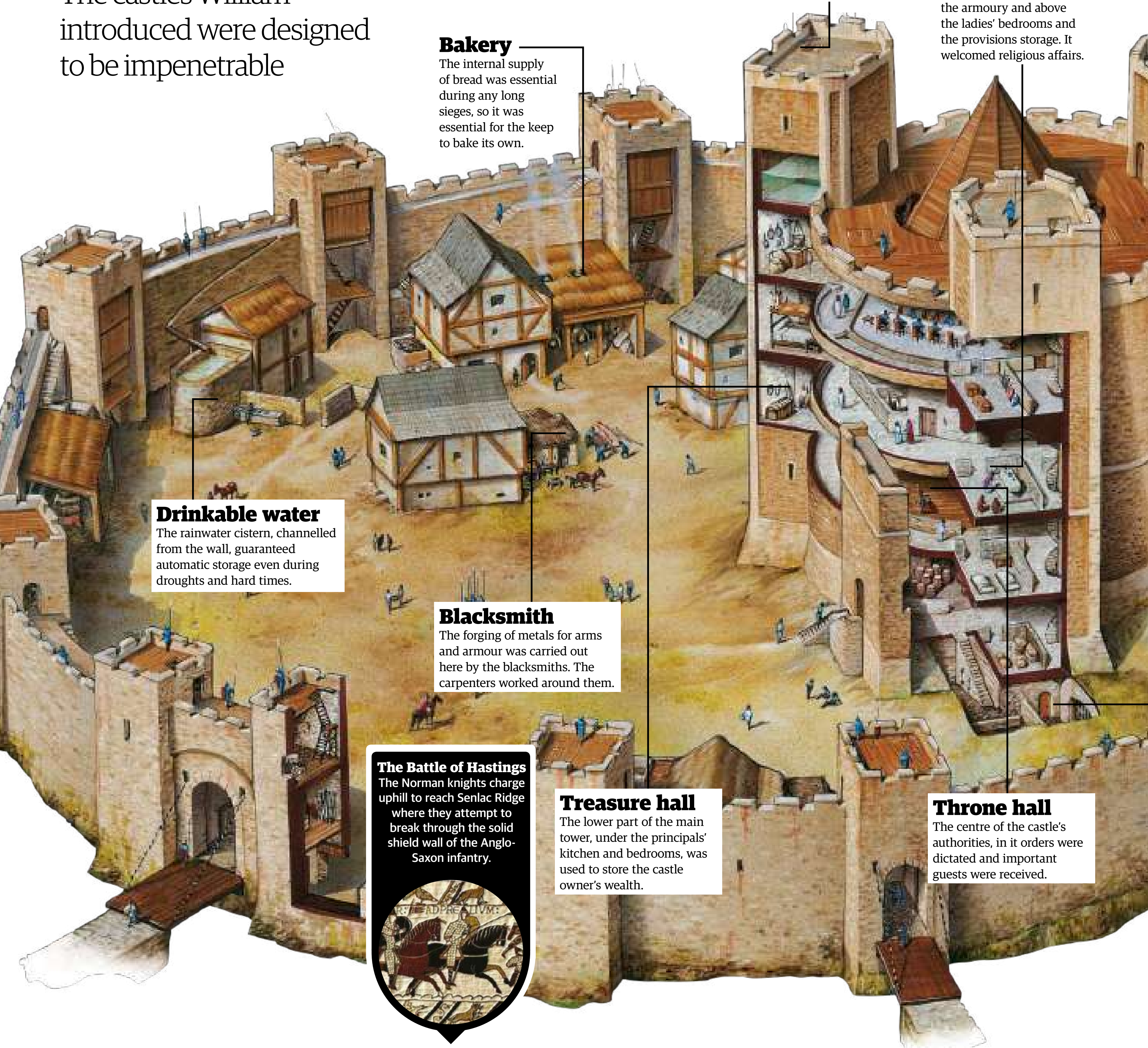
Once he seized the county from his brother, Geoffrey III, in 1068, Count Fulk of Anjou secured an alliance with King Philip against William. Beginning in the early-1070s, he attempted to reclaim Maine on several occasions, but failed.

Philip I
King of France

Threatened by his vassal as king of England, Philip made alliances with Anjou and Flanders to counter the strength of Normandy. Philip's insult infuriated William so much that his enthusiasm to seek vengeance at Mantes led to his death.

Inside a Norman Castle

The castles William introduced were designed to be impenetrable



Bakery
The internal supply of bread was essential during any long sieges, so it was essential for the keep to bake its own.

Main tower
The castle's main tower is the last strong haven in its defence. A potent symbol of power, taking custody of it was very important.

Chapel
Was usually located under the armoury and above the ladies' bedrooms and the provisions storage. It welcomed religious affairs.

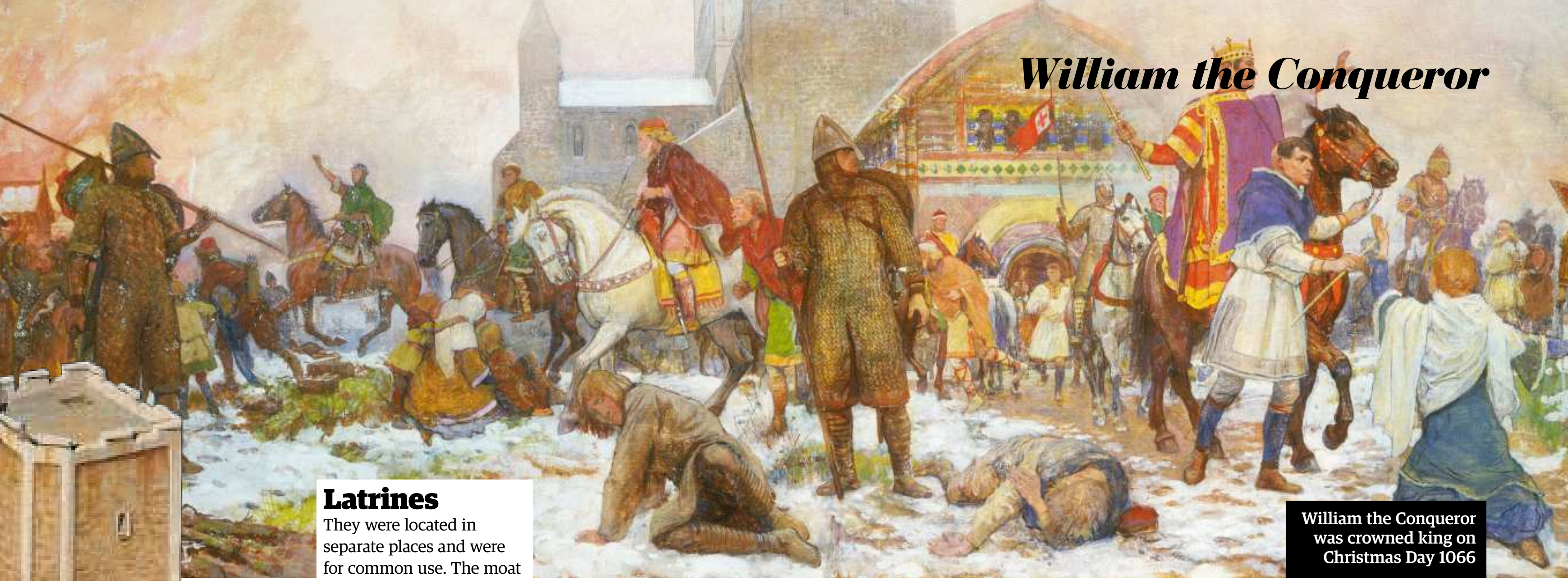
Drinkable water
The rainwater cistern, channelled from the wall, guaranteed automatic storage even during droughts and hard times.

Blacksmith
The forging of metals for arms and armour was carried out here by the blacksmiths. The carpenters worked around them.

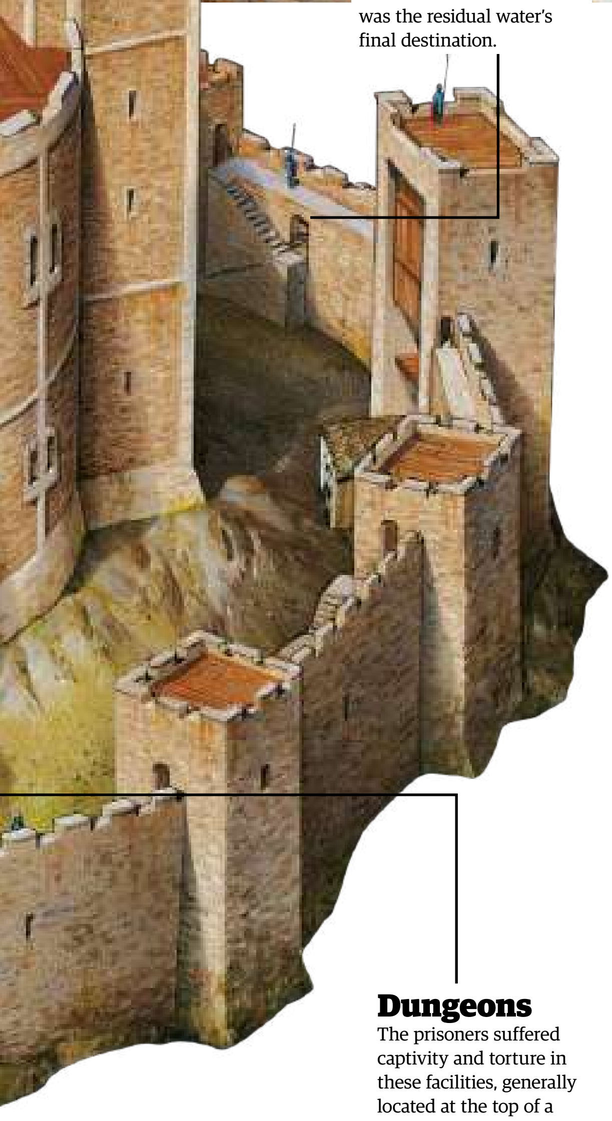
The Battle of Hastings
The Norman knights charge uphill to reach Senlac Ridge where they attempt to break through the solid shield wall of the Anglo-Saxon infantry.

Treasure hall
The lower part of the main tower, under the principals' kitchen and bedrooms, was used to store the castle owner's wealth.

Throne hall
The centre of the castle's authorities, in it orders were dictated and important guests were received.



William the Conqueror was crowned king on Christmas Day 1066



Latrines
They were located in separate places and were for common use. The moat was the residual water's final destination.

Dungeons
The prisoners suffered captivity and torture in these facilities, generally located at the top of a tower or below ground.

Battle of Stamford Bridge. They were then forced to travel the hundreds of miles south to confront the Normans. Although William faced a few setbacks, he landed in England shortly after on 28 September fully confident and immediately began to order his men to construct castles at Pevensey and Hastings to secure his new realm as he advanced to meet Harold.

Fought on 14 October 1066, the bloody and brutal Battle of Hastings lasted throughout the entire day and only ended once Harold was slain. The English gradually submitted during the following weeks and by the end of the year, William had his coronation in London. Although resistance to the foreign regime persisted for several years, the English never again formed a united front. To quell the revolts, William initiated a process of extreme fortification building and slowly removed the English from positions of power to be replaced by Norman men of his choice, like his trusted friends Roger II of Montgomery and William FitzOsbern.

When those methods did not work to subdue the north, the new king was once again forced to use his last resort; horrific violence. In 1070, King William reached his breaking point trying to put down rebellions in the region, so he decided to turn it into a wasteland. Many people were slaughtered, churches were ransacked, crops were destroyed and livestock killed. In the end, those that survived succumbed to starvation, leaving very little population left to ably revolt.

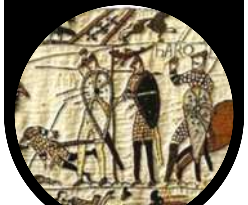
For the last two decades of his life, William's days as a conqueror were over. With the Scots supporting the remaining English rebels, the re-emergence of Anjou and the kingdom of France, as well as the continual threats of Danish invasions of England, enemies surrounded William, but he always managed to keep hold of his territory. Even when his son Robert Curthose rebelled against him in 1078, William effectively handled the revolt just as he had throughout his entire reign, although he was deeply hurt by the break with his heir. To make matters worse, he caught his brother Odo in an attempt to take his much-needed warriors to try to make himself pope. Then, the heartbreak for William reached its apex in 1083 when his beloved wife Matilda passed away on 2 November.

William was never able to fully amend the relationship with his son while alive, but he did accomplish one last great achievement when he commissioned the creation of the Domesday Book in 1085. In order to know exactly how much wealth his new realm contained, William had the most comprehensive survey of any preindustrial civilisation in the world created, giving a priceless, incredibly in-depth view of 11th-century England. Shortly after this grand act, William attempted to once again prove his martial prowess through the conquest of the Vexin. Old age had taken its toll, leading King Philip I to insult William with a remark equating him to a pregnant woman because of his increasing corpulence. Sent into his typical rage, William stormed Mantes in retaliation. But as his men burned the town, William's enthusiasm led his horse to rear up and slam the pommel of his saddle into his stomach.

On 9 September, King William succumbed to the intense internal bleeding caused by the injury. In one final act of reconciliation, his son Robert was still allowed to succeed him as Duke of Normandy. However, the conquests he fought so hard to attain were divided as the Kingdom of England went to his younger son, William Rufus. Therefore, the short-lived Empire of Normandy died with the formidable ruler who created it.

Harold Godwinson is killed

Once Harold is slain the Anglo-Saxon resistance ceases and the English army flees from the battlefield with the Normans in pursuit.



The adventures of Marco Polo

Travelling to locations so exotic many would not believe his tales, Marco Polo lived an extraordinary life filled with wonderment and awe

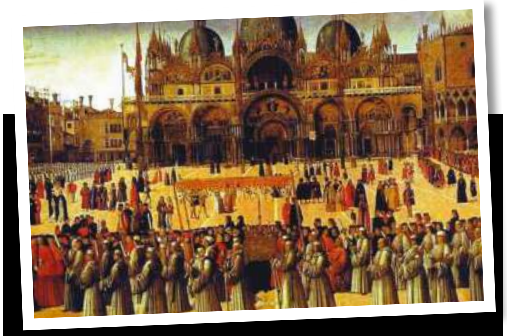
Marco Polo's life sounds like a fairy story. An ordinary boy from Venice is taken by his father and uncle across Asia and meets the world's most powerful ruler, who employs him for 17 years, after which he returns home and records his journey in one of the most famous travel books of all time.

It is an exceptional story, and true (mostly). Even more remarkably - it came about by a succession of pure chances.

In 1253, a year before Marco's birth, his father Niccolò and uncle Matteo left Venice for Constantinople, the capital of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. It had been made a Christian city by the Emperor Constantine, and was now the seat of Orthodox Christianity, as opposed to Rome, the seat of the Catholic west. But Constantinople was in decline, its economy dominated by foreign traders, notably Venetians. Bringing a ship-load of wares, Niccolò and Matteo set about exchanging their goods for jewels. After six years of profitable trade - and probably unaware of Marco's birth - they looked towards Crimea, where they could use their jewels to buy Russian wheat, wax, salted fish and Baltic amber, all much in demand in Europe.

Here fate played a role, several times over. They found that the two Venetian trading bases, Soldaia (today's Sudak) and Caffa (Feodosiya), were just inside the newly established Mongol Empire. Crimea, taken by the Mongols in 1238, was part of the so-called Golden Horde, the western section of an empire that stretched from Russia to China. To escape rivals they headed on east 1,000 kilometres to the local capital, Sarai, a city of tents and wagons on the Volga. After another successful year, they were about to set off home when they learned that Venice's rival city-state, Genoa, had driven the Venetians out of Constantinople. There was only one route possible: eastwards again to Bukhara, then a long return via Afghanistan. But once again fate intervened. A civil war between Mongol sub-states penned them in Bukhara for three years. At that point an envoy from Persia's Mongol ruler met them, and was astonished to find two 'Latins' who by now spoke good Mongol. He told them to go on eastwards, all the way to China, where his lord and master, Genghis's grandson Kublai, would give them a good welcome. "Sirs," he said, in Marco's account, "You will have great profit from it, and great honour." They would not be the first Europeans to be guided across Asia along the Mongol pony-express routes, but their two predecessors, both priests, had gone to Mongolia, not China.

The Polos arrived in Kublai's capital, Xanadu, and were well received. As luck would have it, Kublai was in need of a Christian presence to counterbalance the influence of local religions. So he asked the two Venetians to go home and return



Marco Polo's Venice

Medieval Venice, once a village in a bog, was a place of palaces, canals and glorious churches. From his birth, probably in 1254, Marco, raised in a fine merchant's house near the Rialto Bridge, would have admired the ornate splendours of St Mark's, its west portal displaying four Roman bronze horses seized from Constantinople in 1204. He would have seen the city's ruler, the Doge, in state rituals designed to emphasise power and wealth reaching far beyond the city. With a navy that dominated the eastern Mediterranean, Venice had built an empire, with colonies, ports and islands by the dozen down the Adriatic coast. It owned Crete. Venetian enclaves drew merchants around Greece, to Constantinople and eastwards, across the Black Sea to Crimea, where two bases gave access to the Russian 'river-roads' of the Don and Volga. But these bases now gave access not just to Russia, but to all Asia.

with 100 priests and some holy oil from Jerusalem (perhaps to be used as a magic charm). He gave them a golden safe-conduct pass that allowed them to use the imperial post-roads and sent them off. After another three years of travel, the brothers reached Venice. It was 1269. They had been away 16 years, to find that Niccolò's wife had died and their son Marco was a well-educated 15-year-old ready to see the world.

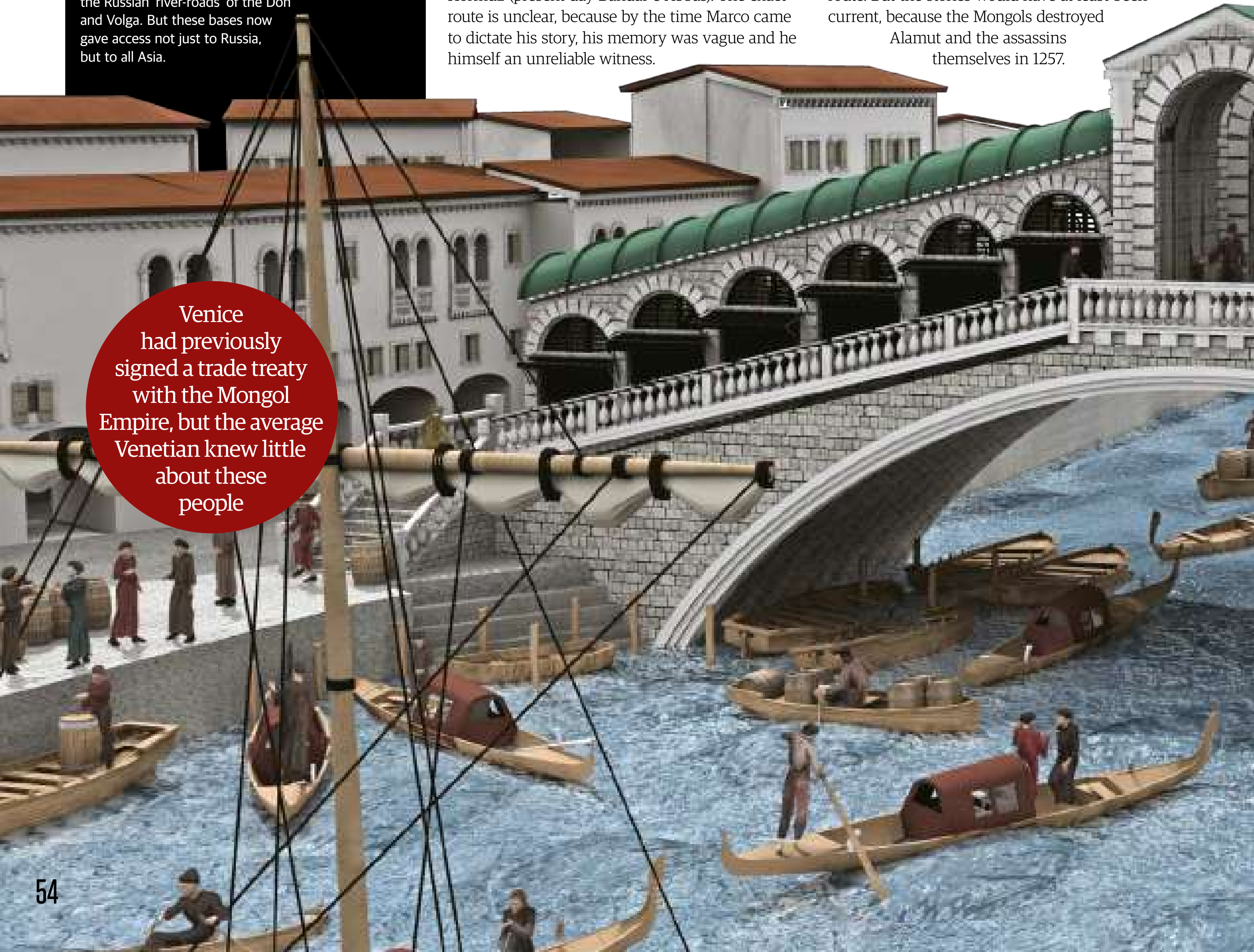
Two years later, in September 1271, father and uncle set off again with Marco, via Jerusalem to pick up the holy oil. By yet another chance, a local prelate, Tedaldo Visconti, had just been made pope. Hoping that all China would fall to Christianity, he wrote a hasty letter to Kublai, urging conversion. He also gave them two - not 100 - priests, who quickly turned back.

The journey rapidly became an epic. There was war everywhere: Muslims fighting Crusaders, Mongol sub-empires fighting each other. Their golden pass would be no guarantee of safe-conduct. They avoided trouble by heading through eastern Turkey, Iraq and Persia, down to the port of Hormuz (present day Bandar-e Abbas). The exact route is unclear, because by the time Marco came to dictate his story, his memory was vague and he himself an unreliable witness.

But his account contains much truth. He claims to have been chased by robbers known as Caraunas ruled by a king called Nogodar. This is a reference to a Mongol force called Qaragunas and their commander Negüder, who turned themselves into marauders swinging unpredictably between loyalty and rebellion. Their descendants became today's Hazara and Mogholi minorities in Afghanistan.

Hormuz was a major port, and appallingly hot, where a certain wind, the simoom, could cook a corpse. Perhaps they were hoping to sail to India, but were put off by boats stitched together with coconut twine. They back-tracked to the north east across present-day Iran, picking up details of the assassins, the murderous Muslim sect named 'hashishin' after their supposed habit of smoking hashish. Marco tells fanciful tales of young men drugged, taken into a beautiful garden and seduced by damsels "singing and playing and making all the caresses and dalliance which they could imagine," before being sent off to kill. The assassins' HQ, Alamut, a grim fortress in the Elburz mountains, was actually 700 kilometres off Marco's route. But the stories would have at least been current, because the Mongols destroyed Alamut and the assassins themselves in 1257.

> Venice had previously signed a trade treaty with the Mongol Empire, but the average Venetian knew little about these people

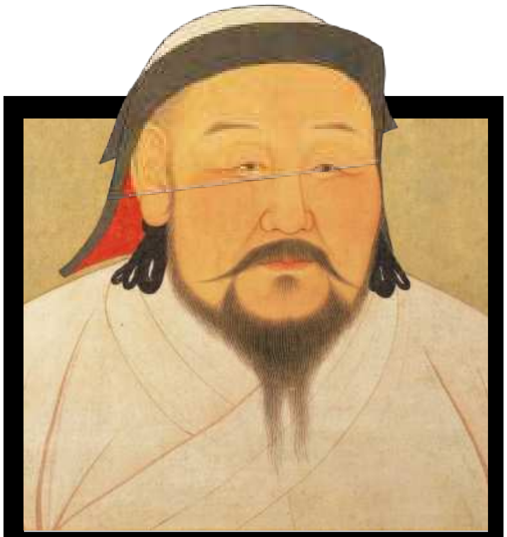


In Afghanistan, Marco describes Balkh, twice ruined by Genghis Khan but now somewhat resurrected as "a noble city and great." He also reveals that he had a young man's eye for female beauty. In one area, the inhabitants were very handsome "especially the women, who are beautiful beyond measure," and in another women padded themselves with cotton trousers "to make themselves look large in the hips."

Then onwards and upwards, through what would become the Wakhan Corridor, a narrow strip of Afghanistan formed by Britain in the 19th century to create a barrier between British India and imperial Russia. It was an established route into China, but a tough and awe-inspiring one through the Pamir mountains, where glaciers grind down from 6,000-metre-high peaks and (according to Marco) the cold was so intense that no birds flew. He followed the Wakhan River up into a land of perpetual snow, where there lived huge sheep with horns 1.5 metres across, the sheep that would, in 1840, be named after him, Ovis Poli, the Marco Polo Sheep. He enjoyed his time there because the pure air cured him of some unspecified complaint.

Descending from the 5,000-metre Wakhjir Pass, Marco and the elder Polos - presumably with a train of horses, camels, yaks and guides - would have come to the caravanserai of what is today Tashkurgan, some 250 kilometres south of Kashgar. Marco does not mention this part of the journey, despite the narrow track, tumbling river and teetering bridges of the Gez Defile and the lone, glaciated bulk of Mustagh Ata, the Father of Ice Mountain. His memory was dominated by the gardens, vineyards and estates of Kashgar, the first major city inside today's China. Then, as now, this was Uighur territory. Marco is rude about the Uighurs, "a wretched, niggardly set of people, who eat ill and drink more ill." In fact, they were a sophisticated people with their own writing system, whose scholars were valued as scribes across much of Asia.

East of Kashgar lies the dead heart of Asia, the gravel wastes and shifting dunes of the Tarim Basin, with country-sized wildernesses - the deserts of the Taklamakan, Lop, Gashun Gobi and Kumtag. Nothing much grows here but scattered camel-thorns, and very little lives but sand-flies, ticks and a diffuse population of wild camels. Marco plays up the dangers, speaking of sand-spirits and demon voices calling men to their deaths. No Medieval traveller would have crossed it - they didn't have to, because there was a long-established route, later to be termed the Silk Road, that led along the southern fringes, from oasis to oasis, fed by rivers running down from the Kunlun mountains. Marco mentions towns - Yarkan, Khotan, Charchan - that are still in existence. Others have vanished beneath the drifting sands, notably Lou Lan, whose rediscovered ruins are now off-limits because China tests its nuclear weapons nearby.



The real 'pleasure dome'

Marco described what he called a 'Cane Palace' in Xanadu, recalled in Coleridge's poem: "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/ A stately pleasure dome decree." Because the poem records a dream, the palace is easily dismissed as a legend. In fact, Marco described a real building. By 'Cane' he meant bamboo, available in semitropical Yunnan, conquered by Kublai in 1253. Cut in half lengthwise to form overlapping, 15-metre 'tiles', bamboo stems formed a domed roof. To counteract the lift induced by high winds on the aerofoil roof, it was held down with '200 silken cords', in Marco's words. Probably used as a hunting lodge in summer, its real purpose was political – it symbolised Kublai's two cultures, Mongolian and Chinese. It combined the style of a Mongolian tent – easily dismantled for winter storage – with Chinese materials and techniques.

This is China's far west, and it was Kublai's far west as well. Like a comet at the edge of the solar system, Marco was now beginning the long, slow fall towards Xanadu, the empire's Sun. But Kublai's control of the Western Regions, referred to by Marco as "Great Turkey," was tenuous. Much of it was claimed by Kublai's rebellious cousin, Kaidu, who remained a thorn in Kublai's side for 40 years.

Marco tells a good story about Kaidu: he had a daughter, the formidable Aijaruc (which he says means Bright Moon; in fact it means Moonlight). So big – "almost like a giantess" – strong and brave was she that no man could match her. Kaidu doted on her, and wanted to marry her off. But she always refused, saying she would only marry a man who could beat her in wrestling. Every challenger had to put up 100 horses. After 100 bouts, Aijaruc had 10,000 horses. Then a rich and powerful prince arrived, offering 1,000 horses. They wrestled. She won. Thereafter, Kaidu took her on campaigns, where she proved her worth dashing into the enemy to seize some man "as deftly as a hawk pounces on a bird." Is there any truth in this? A little. Mongolian women did have a reputation for toughness, and Kaidu did indeed have a favourite daughter, but her name was Kutulun.

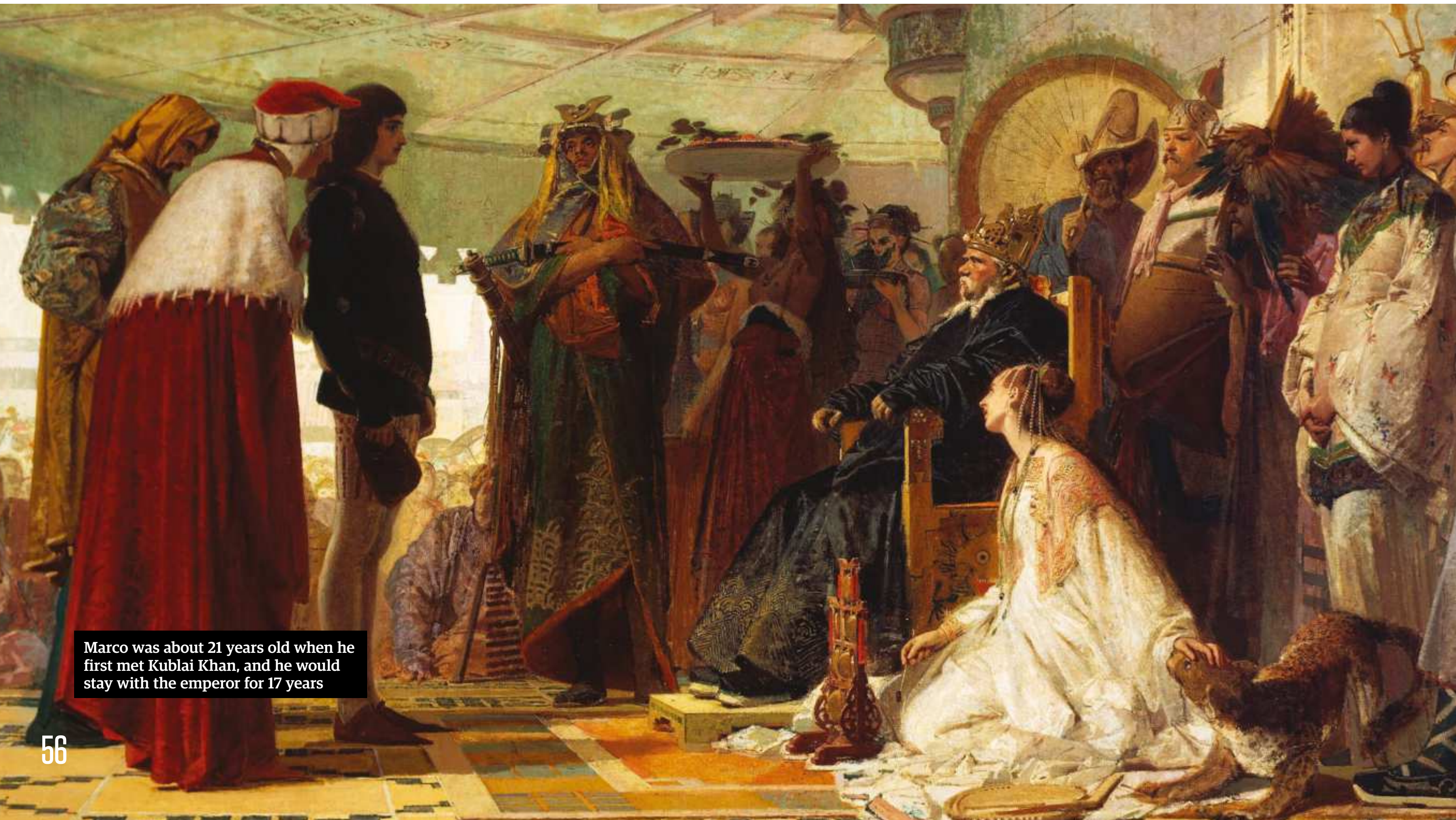
Marco's book recounting his travels was dictated in haste while he was a prisoner of war in Genoa in 1299

At the eastern end of the desert, Marco passed the western end of the Great Wall, built 1,000 years before to keep out nomads like the Mongols. It would not have looked great to him, because it was made of reeds and earth, and had been abandoned for half a century, with the Mongols ruling on both sides of it. If he noticed it at all, he did not think it worth a mention.

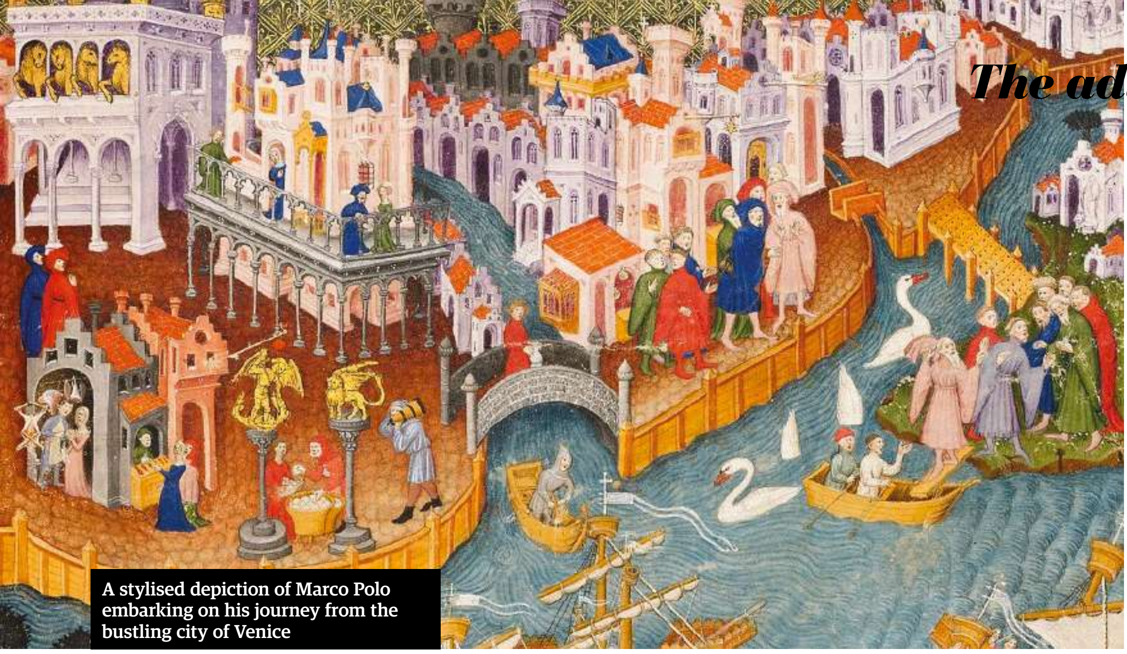
By now (probably the spring of 1275), it seems he and his entourage had been noticed. Messengers had galloped ahead with news that foreigners were coming – Mongol-speakers, bearing a golden pass, without doubt the 'Latins' who had been in Kublai's court ten years previously. Guards rode "a full 40 days" to meet them, and guide them to Xanadu, where Kublai was in residence.

At this point, perhaps because the surroundings were greener, Marco speaks of two animals. It is sometimes asked if Marco actually experienced everything he described. The answer is: almost always. These descriptions are proof. The first refers to a species of shaggy cattle, which he said with some exaggeration were "as large as elephants." This is the first western description of a yak, then unknown in Europe. The second is a deer the size of a dog, which he calls "a very pretty creature." It is a musk deer, from the neck gland of which comes the musk so desired by perfume-makers. He even guesses at its Mongolian name, gudderi – khüder in modern Mongolian – which no one could learn except by experience.

Now half way across modern China, Marco came to Yinchuan, which had been the capital



Marco was about 21 years old when he first met Kublai Khan, and he would stay with the emperor for 17 years


A stylised depiction of Marco Polo embarking on his journey from the bustling city of Venice

of the Tangut people, a separate empire known as Western Xia, which had been destroyed by Genghis Khan in 1227. Marco's terminology is not exactly right, but almost so. He picked up the Mongol name for Yinchuan (Egrigaia in his text, Eriqaya in Mongolian), and the name of the local mountain range (Helan Shan, which he transcribed as Calachan).

On then across the Ordos region of Inner Mongolia, past villages and cultivated fields, to a place of "a great many crafts such as provide for the Emperor's troops." This was Xuanhua, on the main road leading from today's Beijing to what was once the Mongolian border. Here, he would have turned right for Beijing, Kublai's new capital, or left for Xanadu, Kublai's first capital and now his summer residence. It was summer. His guides knew that their lord was in Xanadu. There was only another 250 kilometres to go.

Xanadu is a name derived from the Chinese Shang Du, 'Upper Capital,' as opposed to Beijing, which was Dadu, 'Great Capital'. We spell it that way because that was how the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge spelled it in his famous poem written on waking from a dream in 1797:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree
Where Alph the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

There was a 'pleasure dome', but no caves, or Alph, and the Pacific is almost 400 kilometres away. Xanadu was and is on the Mongolian plateau, a place of rolling grasslands and low hills. In Marco's day, this Chinese-style city had 120,000 inhabitants, approached along the so-called Royal Road, which cut through a mass of round felt tents, horses, camels and traders.

Guided through the main gate to "a very fine marble palace," the three were taken into an audience with Kublai. He was delighted to see his 'Latin' envoys back again. Marco was overwhelmed with admiration of "the most potent man that ever hath existed." They knelt, then prostrated themselves, rose, and described their journey. They presented the pope's letter and the holy oil. Then Kublai asked about Marco.

"Sire," said Niccolò, "He is my son and your liegeman," handing Marco over to Kublai's service.

"Welcome is he too," said Kublai, beginning a relationship that would last 17 years. In that time, Marco was as close to the emperor as any minister, perhaps closer, because Kublai valued him as an independent source of information, untouched by the court's many rival groups. Speaking good Mongolian, Marco went on at least five great journeys to the corners of Kublai's Chinese possessions, probably to gather information on foreigners and minorities. Almost certainly, he was a member of the emperor's keshig, his 12,000-strong personal bodyguard. Later, he wrote of what he saw for Europe's Christian readers, but did not reveal why he was sent, probably because it implied too close a relationship with a non-Christian ruler.

Inspired by Marco Polo's accounts, explorer Christopher Columbus proposed navigating the Atlantic to reach China

Between his journeys, he experienced court life in all its magnificence. He accompanied Kublai as he travelled between Xanadu and his new, main capital Beijing, a journey that took three weeks, with Kublai riding in a specially designed room strapped onto four elephants, harnessed abreast. Beijing, chosen because it was the key to the conquest and rule of all China, was built almost from scratch after the destruction caused by Kublai's grandfather, Genghis Khan: temples, gardens, lakes and a palace of varnished woodwork and glittering tiles. Uncounted halls, treasure rooms, offices and apartments surrounded an audience hall that could host 6,000 diners. In nearby parklands, deer and gazelle grazed. Court life revolved around 150 long-established rituals, controlled by four government departments and a Board of Rites. Other departments regimented 17,000 scholar-officials. The three main state occasions were the Khan's birthday at the end of September, New Year's Day and the spring hunt.

For New Year's Day and the khan's birthday, gifts flowed from the far reaches of the empire. Horses, elephants and camels paraded, thousands dressed in white (for luck) touched their foreheads to the floor in adulation and joined a vast feast, with the emperor and his entourage on a raised platform, served by ministers with napkins stuffed in their mouths, so that "no breath or odour from their persons should taint the dish or the goblets presented to the Lord."

"Marco was as close to the emperor as any minister"

On 1 March, Kublai supervised hunting on an industrial scale. In 40 days, the hunt covered some 500 kilometres. Marco describes 14,000 huntsmen and 10,000 falconers (though the numbers are probably exaggerated) with gyrfalcons, eagles, peregrines, hawks and goshawks, backed by 2,000 mastiff-like dogs, all hunting hare, foxes, deer, boar, even wolves. At night, the emperor camped in a tent-city that surrounded his own huge tent, which was lined with ermine and sable furs and waterproofed with tiger skins. By day, the emperor was in his vast howdah on his four elephants.

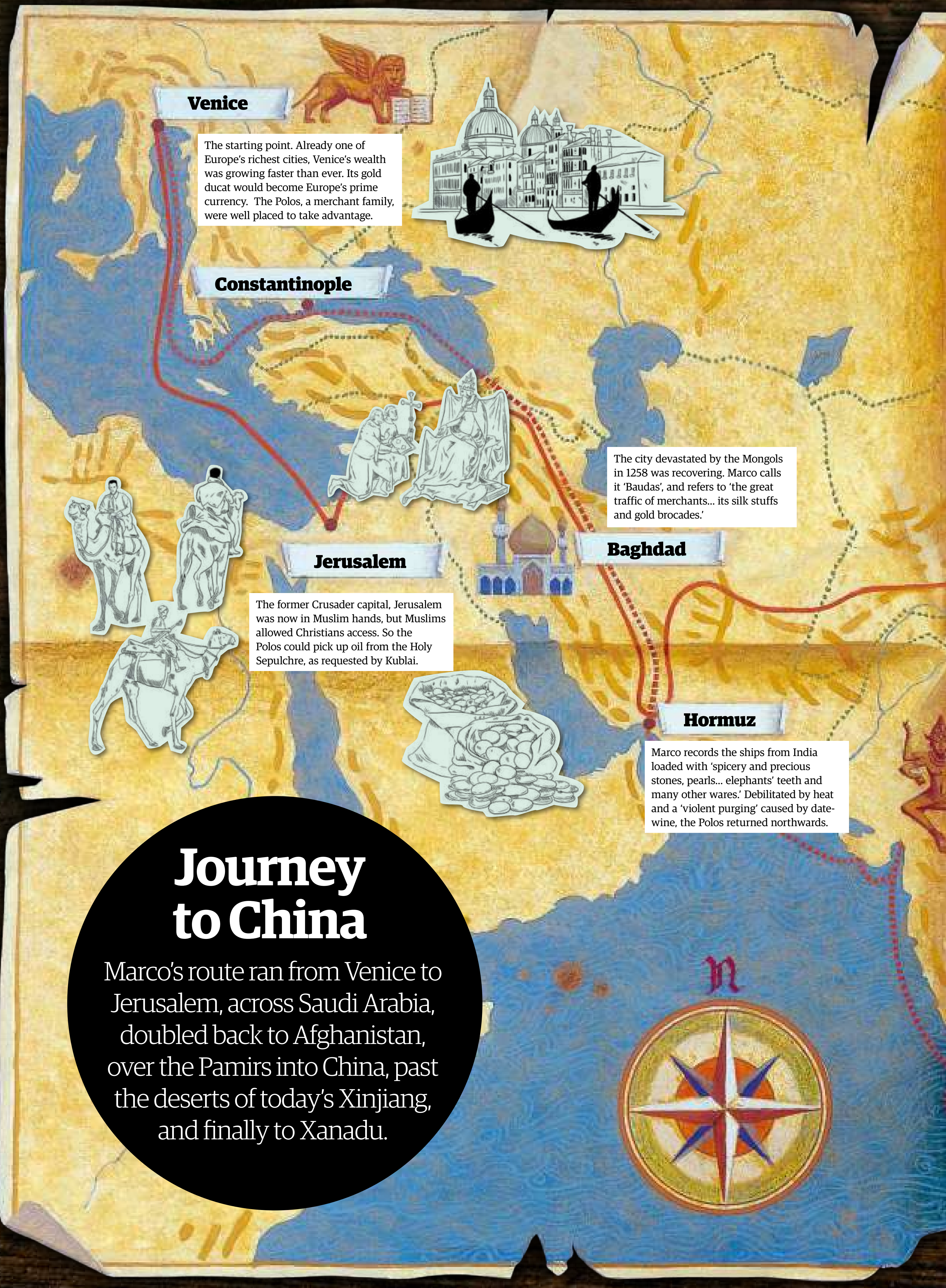
Marco described the scene: "And sometimes as they may be going along, the Emperor from his chamber is holding discourse with his barons, one of the latter shall exclaim: 'Sire! Look out for cranes!' then the Emperor instantly has the top of his chamber thrown open, and having marked the cranes, he casts one of his gyrfalcons."

For Marco, this life ended in 1292. Kublai was old, obese and in poor health. Marco, his father and uncle were nervous of their future under a new ruler. Kublai unwillingly allowed them to leave by sea as companions for a princess who was to be married to one of Kublai's relatives in Persia. They eventually arrived home in 1296, two years after Kublai's death.

As well as reigning over the vast Mongol Empire, Kublai Khan also founded the Yuan dynasty in China

Journey to China

Marco's route ran from Venice to Jerusalem, across Saudi Arabia, doubled back to Afghanistan, over the Pamirs into China, past the deserts of today's Xinjiang, and finally to Xanadu.



Venice

The starting point. Already one of Europe's richest cities, Venice's wealth was growing faster than ever. Its gold ducat would become Europe's prime currency. The Polos, a merchant family, were well placed to take advantage.

Constantinople

Jerusalem

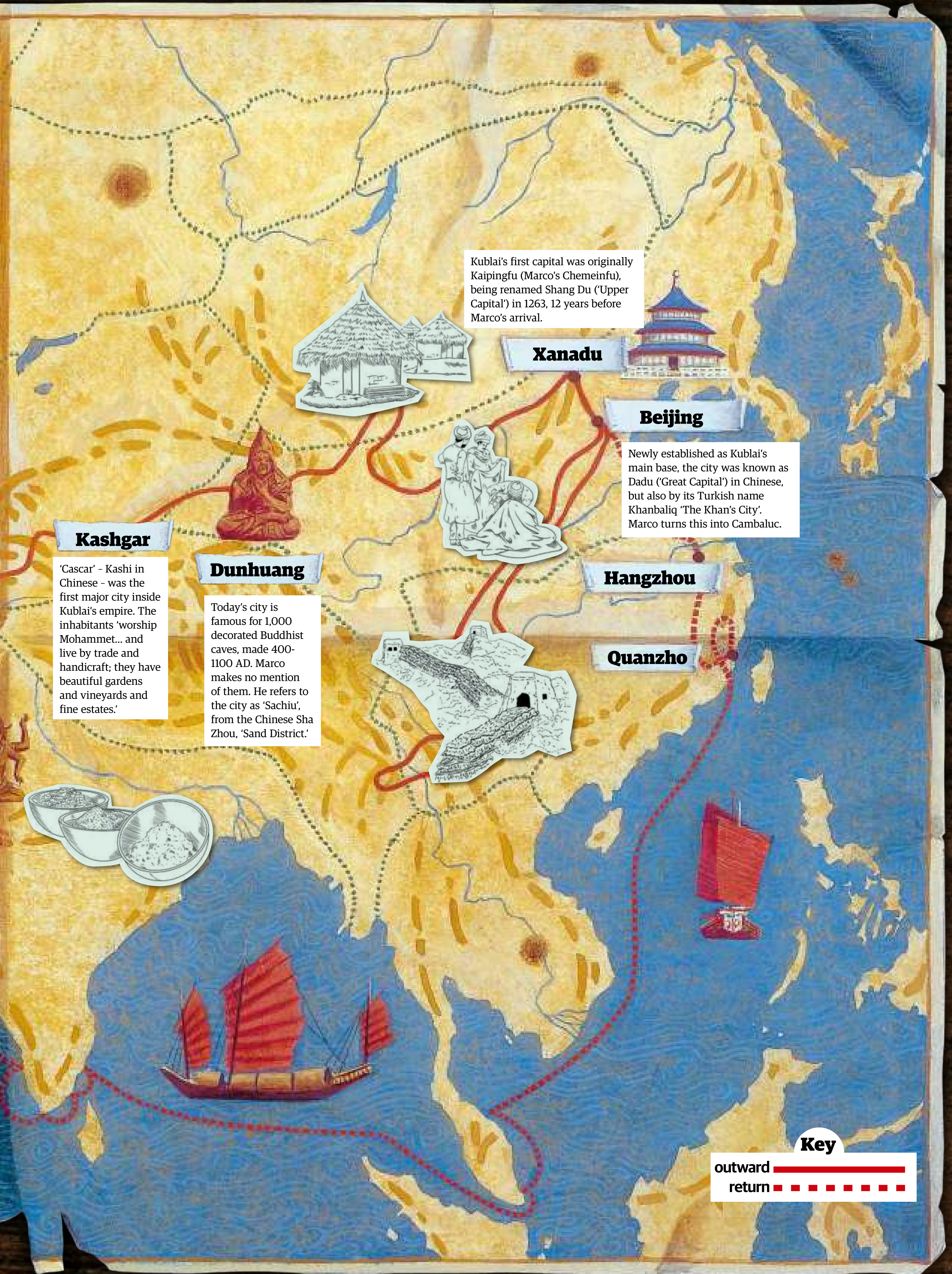
The former Crusader capital, Jerusalem was now in Muslim hands, but Muslims allowed Christians access. So the Polos could pick up oil from the Holy Sepulchre, as requested by Kublai.

Baghdad

The city devastated by the Mongols in 1258 was recovering. Marco calls it 'Baudas', and refers to 'the great traffic of merchants… its silk stuffs and gold brocades.'

Hormuz

Marco records the ships from India loaded with 'spicery and precious stones, pearls… elephants' teeth and many other wares.' Debilitated by heat and a 'violent purging' caused by date-wine, the Polos returned northwards.



Kublai's first capital was originally Kaipingfu (Marco's Chemeinfu), being renamed Shang Du ('Upper Capital') in 1263, 12 years before Marco's arrival.

Newly established as Kublai's main base, the city was known as Dadu ('Great Capital') in Chinese, but also by its Turkish name Khanbaliq 'The Khan's City'. Marco turns this into Cambaluc.

'Cascar' - Kashi in Chinese - was the first major city inside Kublai's empire. The inhabitants 'worship Mohammet... and live by trade and handicraft; they have beautiful gardens and vineyards and fine estates.'

Today's city is famous for 1,000 decorated Buddhist caves, made 400-1100 AD. Marco makes no mention of them. He refers to the city as 'Sachiu', from the Chinese Sha Zhou, 'Sand District.'

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A century of blood and wrath

In the Hundred Years' War, England and France were embroiled in a series of bitter, bloody battles that re-shaped the future of the continent forever

The genesis of the longest-running conflict in European history finds its origins, like so many wars before and after it, in the eternal struggle for territory and an insatiable thirst for power. Ever since William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy, claimed the English crown as his own, the monarchs of England had a legitimate claim to lands and titles of note in the Kingdom of France. Over time these lands were reduced by a long line of French kings, but England continued to hold a stake in the future of its neighbour.

For King Edward III of England, that investment in France ran deeper – to the Plantagenet monarch it was a birthright. The death of the heirless Charles IV of France provided Edward with the opening he needed, but an old Salic Law prohibited the order of succession passing through a woman (his mother was the sister of the French king), so the crown was awarded by the French Assembly to Philip of Valois. Philip VI wasted no time undermining his rival either, including funding an invasion of England by Scottish monarch David II. The invasion failed, but a French scheme so close to home enraged Edward. In 1337, in order to quell Edward's influence on his soil, Philip confiscated the largest English fiefdom on the French mainland, Aquitaine.

In response, Edward began forming alliances with key noble families, such as the Flemings and the Montforts, houses who cared little for the current French monarch. With Edward's own son – also named Edward and known later as The Black Prince – also conspiring on French soil to create more alliances for the English, the two nations rolled towards the first pitched confrontation of the Hundred Years' War – the Battle of Crécy.

On 26 August 1346, the armies of Edward arrived near the town of Crécy in Normandy. One month prior, the English king had landed 14,000 men on Normandy's shores and began ravaging the French countryside, razing villages to the ground. The armies of Philip rallied to respond, and a force of 12,000 met them at Crécy. Philip's army consisted of 8,000 mounted knights and 4,000 hired Genoese crossbowmen, while the bulk of Edward's force consisted of 10,000 English archers. Those archers, armed with the unique English longbow, would make all the difference.

When Philip's forces attacked first, hoping to catch the English by the surprise, Edward's longbowman filled the air thick with arrows and cut the charging cavalry down. The longbow also out-ranged the traditional bow designs of the French, enabling the English to significantly weaken Philip's army before the cavalry and infantry clashed. By the time night fell, more than a third of the French king's army had been cut down, including his own brother, Charles II of Alençon.

Edward's victory at Crécy effectively crippled the French army and left the way open for him to continue his campaign. By 1347, Calais had fallen and the English had established a key stronghold that would enable them to bolster their campaign

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Despite being referred to as a century-long conflict, the Hundred Years' War actually lasted for 116 years

"Led by the Black Prince, the English forces routed those of John II of France"

with fresh soldiers and supplies. The death of Charles VI in 1350, and the spread of the Black Death in Paris and beyond only served to further the English cause.

The French army often kept its distance over the coming years, only blocking the advance of the English with pitched battles. The largest of these to follow Crécy was at Poitiers on 19 September 1356, and it proved a familiar echo of that first battle - a French army eviscerated by loosed English arrows and the fall from grace of the mounted charge. Led by the Black Prince, the English forces routed those of John II of France, with the French king himself taken prisoner.

The Black Prince died in 1376, and so when Edward III died the following year, the crown passed to his grandson, Richard II. Just ten years old when he inherited the throne, Richard continued the English acquisition of French lands. The damage rendered by the invading English kings was more than just economical or geographical - it destroyed any sense of French unity, as the nobility turned on one another. By 1407, the nation descended into civil war as the two most powerful branches of the royal family - the Houses of Orléans and Burgundy - fought for control of the throne.

> The war actually halted a number of times, mainly due to catastrophic outbreaks of bubonic plague and the Black Death

While France fractured into civil turmoil, its armies were gathered together under Charles I of Albret, the Constable of France, to face the English in another decisive battle. Much like the French throne - which was now occupied by Charles VI, grandson of John II - the English crown had been worn through the bloody battles of the Hundred Years' War by a handful of kings, and its current royal claimant, Henry V, was ready to fight the battle that could potentially end the campaign for good. Like his predecessors, Henry believed himself the rightful heir to the French throne and he famously marched to victory on the fields of Agincourt on 25 October 1415.

Agincourt completed a trifecta of bloody pitched battles that crushed the forces of the French monarchy. Charles and Albret had managed to form the largest Frankish army of the conflict (estimates ranged from 12,000 to 36,000) and they outnumbered the roughly 6,000-9,000 men under Henry's banner. But Henry had learned the lessons of the war and the bulk of that number were English and Welsh longbowmen who pummelled the French archers and infantry. By the time, the French retreated they had lost between 7,000-10,000 men.

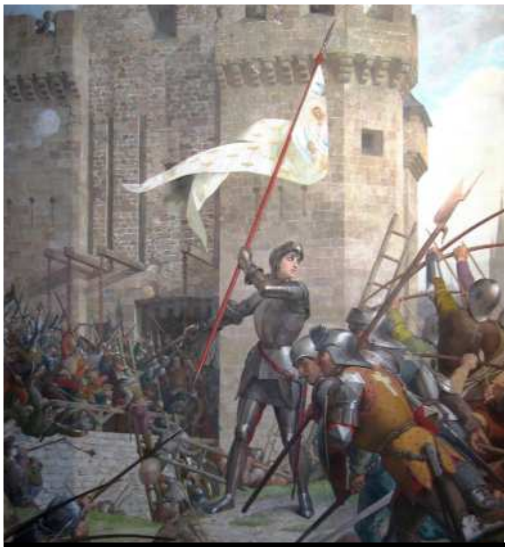
The loss at Agincourt forced Charles to recognise Henry as the official heir to the throne. With the country still racked by civil war, acknowledging the military might of Henry as king was, ironically, the most stable option for the nation. However, both Henry and Charles died within two months of one another in 1422, leaving the agreement in tatters. Both Henry's successor, Henry VI, and Charles' son, the Dauphin, made claims to the throne and it would be the under the latter that the war would truly change.

Henry VI's forces pushed for an advantage as they entered the region of Orléans. In September 1428, the English king's forces began besieging the tactical linchpin that was the region's namesake, but the attack seemingly faltered under the most unlikely of sources.

A peasant-born girl by the name of Joan of Arc had arrived at the court of the Dauphin claiming heavenly visions of his victory against the English. She was sent with a relief force and her rallying presence helped destroy the English army. Joan would be captured shortly after, but her subsequent execution by burning would only serve to fuel the fires of the French resurgence.

The martyrdom of Joan of Arc and the popularity of the Dauphin eventually led one of Henry VI's most important French allies, the Duke of Burgundy, to defect in 1435. Soon after, the Dauphin was officially recognised as Charles VII, King of France. The nation now had a Frankish monarch to rally behind, one not afraid to use new innovations such as the cannon to help negate the deadly power of the English longbow.

The unification of Orléans and Burgundy under a Valois monarch was the turning point of the conflict. As the years rolled by, Charles' forces grew stronger as he drove the usurpers further and further towards the coast. On 15 April 1450, the French clashed with the English at the Battle of Formigny and crushed the forces of Henry VI with



Joan of Arc was a vital part of the French campaign during the Lancastrian era of the conflict, her efforts even seeing her canonised as a result

Defining moment

Onset of the Hundred Years' War 1336

Tensions between England and France had simmered with barely tempered rivalry, but hostilities began to rise when Philip VI is named King of France instead of the better connected King Edward III of England. Negotiations turn black when Edward offers refuge to a defector from Philip's court, Robert III of Artois. When Edward refuses to agree to Philip's demands, the French king reacts by taking control of the English-claimed French fiefdom of Guienne/Aquitaine. Edward does not react well and declares war on France, igniting the Hundred Years' War.

Timeline

1328

- **The death of Charles IV of France**
  Charles IV dies at Vincennes without a male heir to continue the House of Capet. His death creates a power vacuum that leads to his cousin, Philip of Valois becoming Philip VI of France.
  1 February 1328

1346

- **English victory at Crécy**
  The armies of Edward III of England claim a decisive early victory at the Battle of Crécy. The longbow plays a pivotal role and the battle effectively cripples the armies of France.
  26 August 1346

1356

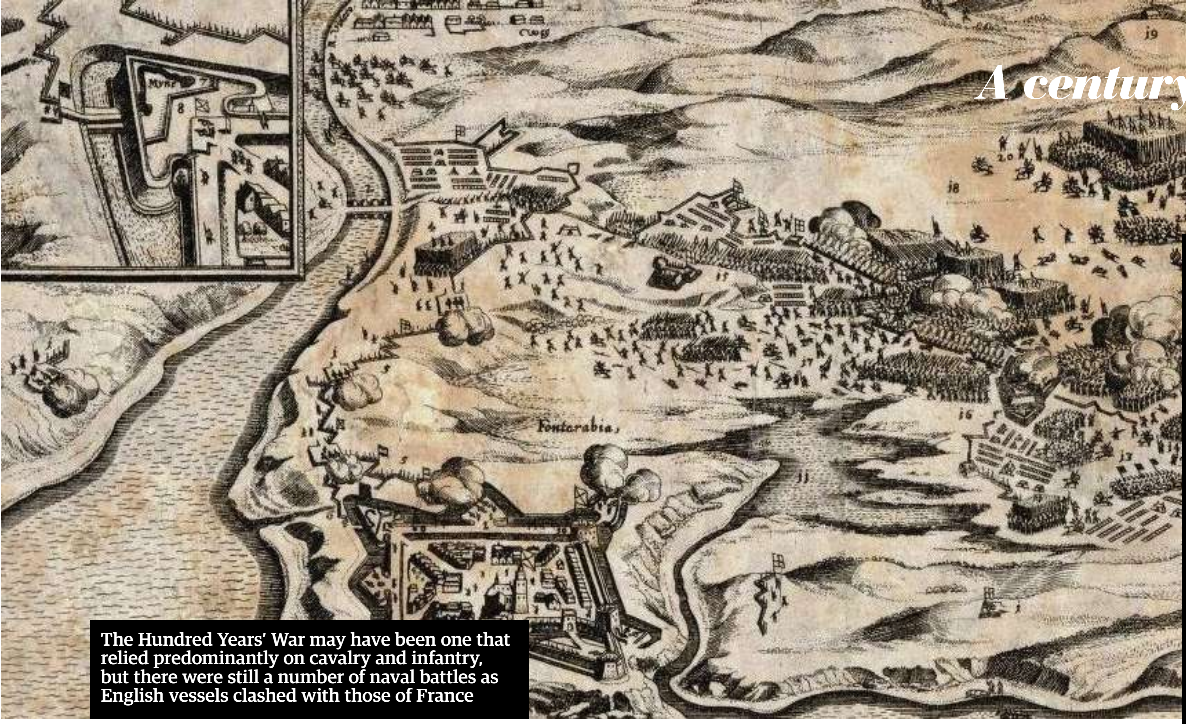
- **France crushed at Poitiers**
  The English claim another powerful victory against the French near Poitiers. The French suffer catastrophic losses and the French king, John II, is captured alive.
  19 September 1356

1407

- **French civil war erupts**
  When the brother of Charles VI of France, Louis of Orléans, is murdered on the orders of the king's son, John the Fearless, the nation descends into a bitter war for succession.
  23 November 1407

1415

- **Henry V triumphs at Agincourt**
  On the fields of Agincourt, Henry V of England claims the third of three decisive military victories over the French. His victory almost brings the conflict to an end.
  25 October 1415



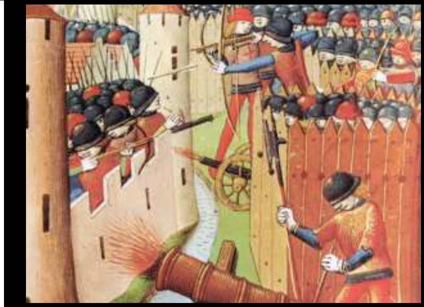
The Hundred Years' War may have been one that relied predominantly on cavalry and infantry, but there were still a number of naval battles as English vessels clashed with those of France

cannon, arrow and blade. The loss at Formigny broke the English and by the end of 1453, both Castilian and Calais, the last vantage points of the English invasion were crushed. And so Charles brought the Hundred Years' War to an end with a river of English blood.

Following 116 years of a conflict that nearly tore Europe apart on more than one occasion, the continent would never be the same again. The loss of every single territory in France was a humiliation the national consciousness could not begin to comprehend, and it soon led to political infighting as Henry VI's power base crumbled. With the Plantagenet hold on the throne weakened by its warring Houses of Lancaster and York, Henry Tudor would ultimately seize power following the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485.

For France, the victories at the end of the Hundred Years' War were a bittersweet success. For the next years of his reign, Charles VII began rebuilding a nation that was now united under one banner. He introduced new reforms to taxation and social structure, enabling France to begin reigniting the grand scale of its economy. A popular man for most of his reign, the resounding success at the end of war gave Charles VII the opportunity to heal his kingdom following a century of war and civil conflict.

> The war had raged for so long that the kings of England and France were children, too young to bear the burden



The rise of gunpowder and guns

Think of famous battles such as the bloody encounter at Agincourt and the image of the longbow, cutting down ranks in their droves, springs to mind. It was a weapon that changed the course of the war, but it's easy to forget just how much military engineering transformed over those 116 years.

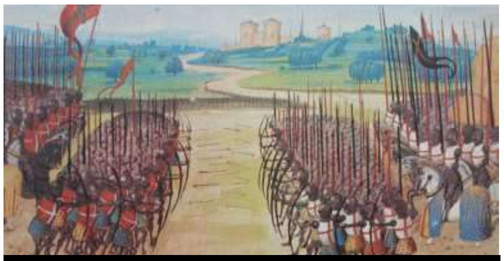
The introduction of gunpowder to the battlefields was a slow one, only serving to present a token sense of variety at Agincourt, but as the conflict entered its final years the use of artillery became a significant tactic. The first cannons were stationary, difficult to work and short of range, but by the 1380s artillery was mobile and could wipe out advancing troops like a burning hand of God.

The advancements in gunpowder improved fastest for the French, which was a significant influence during the war's final confrontations. Battles such as at Castillon in 1453, proved the French cannon to be more effective at a longer range, rendering the English longbow obsolete.

Defining moment

Treaty of Troyes is signed 1420

Following the decisive victory at Agincourt, the further acquisition of French territory by the English and the seemingly never-ending civil war France was forced to officially recognise Henry V's claims on the French throne. The issue of succession had led to the assassination of Charles VI's brother and the eventual disinheritance of the Dauphin, John the Fearless. With the throne left weakened in the wake of the king's growing bouts of madness, the official naming of Henry as heir was the best option France had to restore some semblance of order to the highest seat of office in the land.



One of the most famous battles of the 116-year-long conflict was the one fought on the fields of Agincourt, where two armies waged war with longbows

Defining moment

The Hundred Years' War ends

1453

With Charles VII's acquisition of Aquitaine and Normandy, English control in France is destroyed, the territory claimed by Henry V over three decades before lost in a series of military blunders and decisive defeats. France bands under the banner of Charles and seeks to make the nation whole again by besting an enemy that had conquered them at Agincourt. The loss of so much continental territory is a huge blow for the English and leads to years of conflict between the Houses of Lancaster and York, culminating in the Wars of the Roses.

1429

Joan of Arc liberates Orléans
Joan of Arc, a peasant-born woman who claims heavenly visions sent her to support Charles VII of France, helps liberate Orléans from the English in the first true decisive victory for the French.
8 May 1429

1431

Joan of Arc is burned at the stake
Following her capture at Compiègne, the English and the Spanish Inquisition charge her with heresy and have her burned at the stake. She is just 19 years of age. She is later canonised.
30 May 1431

1435

The Treaty of Arras
Charles VII of France signs a treaty with England and Burgundy, effectively ending the civil war. France can finally begin to consolidate its resources into a single entity. The Hundred Years' War continues.
21 September 1435

1450

Cannons elevate the French
The use of artillery at the Battle of Formigny provides France with a powerful and defiant means of destroying the longbow-dependant armies of the English. English control in France is waning.
15 April 1450

1453

Battle of Castillon
A crucial victory for the French in Gascony near the town of Castillon-sur-Dordogne crushes the English forces in France, forcing them to retreat to their last true stronghold in Calais.
17 July 1453

© Alamy

A clash of kings at Agincourt

At the height of the Hundred Years' War, Henry V claimed victory in one of the Medieval period's bloodiest battles

While his father, Henry IV, had been preoccupied with consolidating - and in the process effectively legitimising - his rule, his son, King Henry V of England, saw the opportunity to expand Britain's holdings by taking back lands he believed rightfully belonged to him, starting with France.

In 1415, he proposed to marry Catherine, the daughter of the French king Charles VI, in addition to audaciously demanding the handover of the Plantagenet lands of Normandy and Anjou as her dowry. Unsurprisingly, Charles refused this offer from the upstart young king, with one account claiming that he sent the young Henry a case of tennis balls - the message being that his time would be better spent playing games than attempting to invade France.

Unperturbed by Charles' taunting, Henry set sail for France, determined to capture the throne for himself. As well as the prospect of regaining the lost lands of his ancestors, success abroad would have the effect of galvanising support back home, and in the process focus attention away from his cousins' royal ambitions.

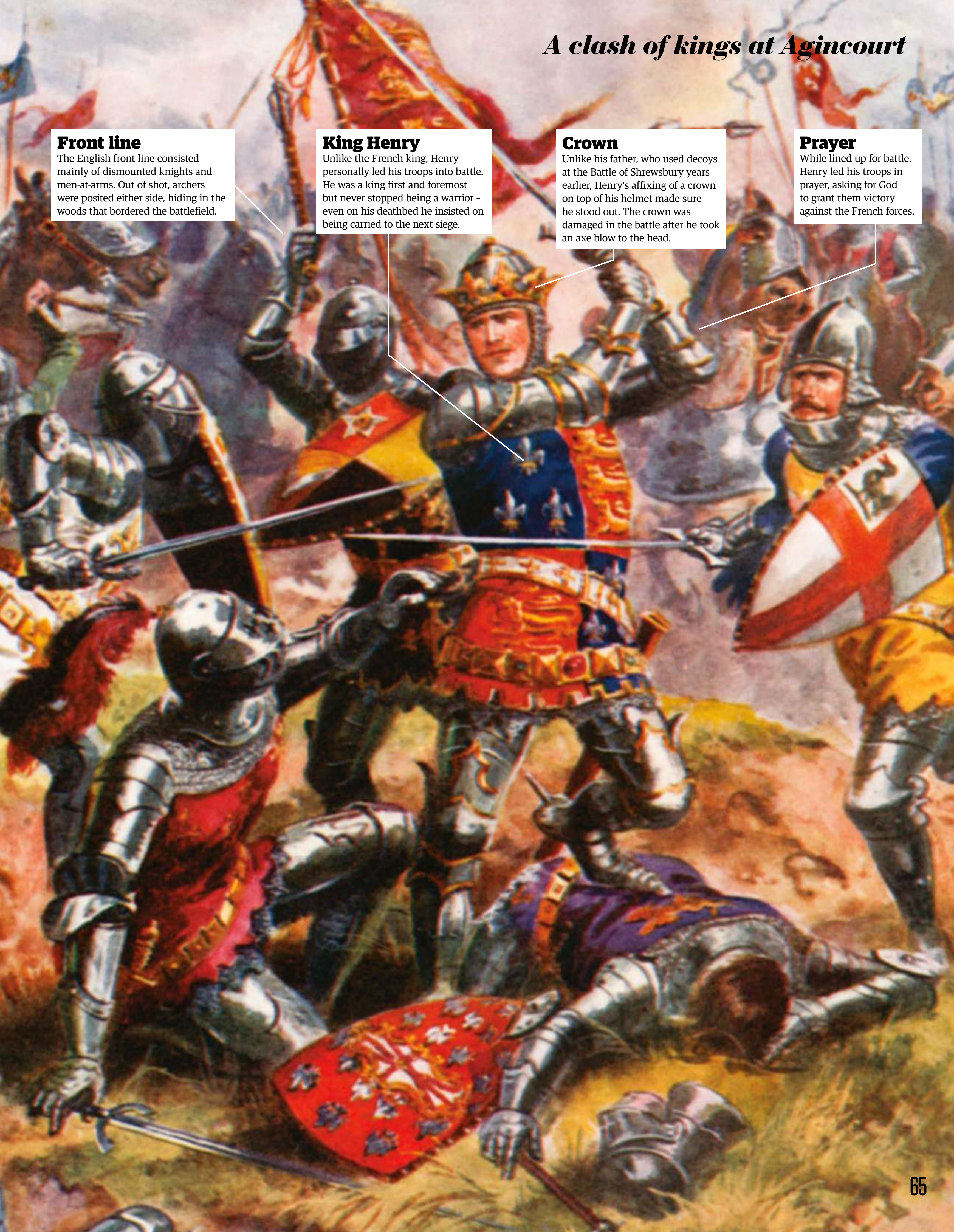
His success was almost instant. Immediately upon landing, he captured the port of Harfleur, although while on the way to the port of Calais, he found his path blocked by an army that substantially outnumbered his own. Faced with this much-larger French army, he put his superior tactical acumen to good use, decimating the French forces via the use of vast quantities of longbow archers to devastating effect. Between 7,500 and 10,000 French soldiers are estimated to have been killed according to various accounts, with about 1,500 noblemen taken prisoner, while the English forces' casualties are numbered at around 112, with high-ranking noblemen like the Duke of York and the Earl of Suffolk being counted among the dead. Even more French prisoners were originally taken, but in a show of calculated - but arguably justifiable - ruthlessness, Henry had ordered many of them to be put to death in order to avoid the possibility of them linking up with the remnants of the French forces in order to carry out a retaliatory attack.

Proving that this decisive victory was no fluke, Henry followed up this stunning victory with the conquest of Normandy - a campaign that lasted for three years. By June 1419, Henry controlled most of Normandy. Agincourt had not only been a military triumph; it had been a moral victory too, galvanising the English both abroad and at home.

Facing defeat, Charles agreed to the Treaty of Troyes, which formally recognised Henry as the heir to the French throne - at the expense of his own son - and finally allowed Henry to marry Catherine. Flushed with success, in February 1421 he returned to England for the first time in three and a half years, arriving in his homeland as a conquering hero.

His successful conquest of much of the country's hated enemy had made him extremely popular back home, and the Battle of Agincourt in particular would forever serve as a poignant example of his strength, tactical skill and ingenuity in battle - yet another example of the plucky underdog spirit and ability to triumph against the odds that British forces would go on to demonstrate in the future.

A clash of kings at Agincourt



Front line
The English front line consisted mainly of dismounted knights and men-at-arms. Out of shot, archers were posited either side, hiding in the woods that bordered the battlefield.

King Henry
Unlike the French king, Henry personally led his troops into battle. He was a king first and foremost but never stopped being a warrior - even on his deathbed he insisted on being carried to the next siege.

Crown
Unlike his father, who used decoys at the Battle of Shrewsbury years earlier, Henry's affixing of a crown on top of his helmet made sure he stood out. The crown was damaged in the battle after he took an axe blow to the head.

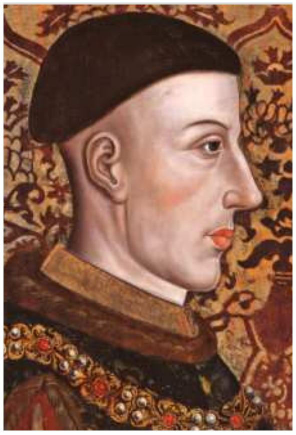
Prayer
While lined up for battle, Henry led his troops in prayer, asking for God to grant them victory against the French forces.

English

TROOPS 6,000-9,000

LONGBOWMEN 5,000

KNIGHTS 1,000



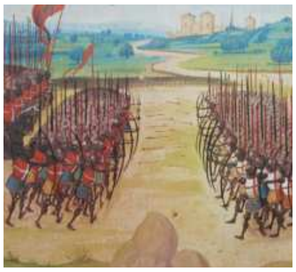
King Henry V

Leader

King Henry was a skilled battle commander, leading his troops into battle and fighting alongside them.

Strengths Brave and experienced military leader.

Weaknesses His forces were numerically inferior to those of the French.



Longbowman

Key unit

The effectiveness of the English longbowmen played a massive part in the success of the battle.

Strengths Long range and difficult to attack.

Weaknesses Relatively poorly armoured and vulnerable if attacked.

Longbow

Key weapon

The longbow's six arrows per minute could wound at 360m (1,200ft), kill at 180m (600ft) and even penetrate armour at 90m (300ft).

Strengths Accurate and destructive in large numbers.

Weaknesses Finite number of arrows available to them.

01 Camping for the night

On 24 October, about 48 kilometres (30 miles) from Calais in the town of Frévent, English scouts reported an immense French army blocking the road ahead. Seeing that they could not pass without meeting them in battle, Henry ordered his forces to camp there for the night.

02 Taking their positions

The English positioned themselves across the road to Calais in three groups of knights and men-at-arms: the right side led by Lord Camoys, the left by Sir Thomas Erpingham and the Duke of York in the centre. The French had the Constable of France leading the first line, the Dukes of Bar and d'Alencon the second and the Counts of Merle and Falconberg in charge of the third.

03 Forward banners

Bored of waiting for the French to begin the attack, Henry ordered his troops to advance. Once within range of the French archers, the English troops halted, the divisions closed and the archers set a series of pointed stakes in the ground, forming a fence. Within the woods surrounding the two armies, Henry directed groups of archers and men-at-arms to move through the trees to get closer to the French.

04 Arrows away

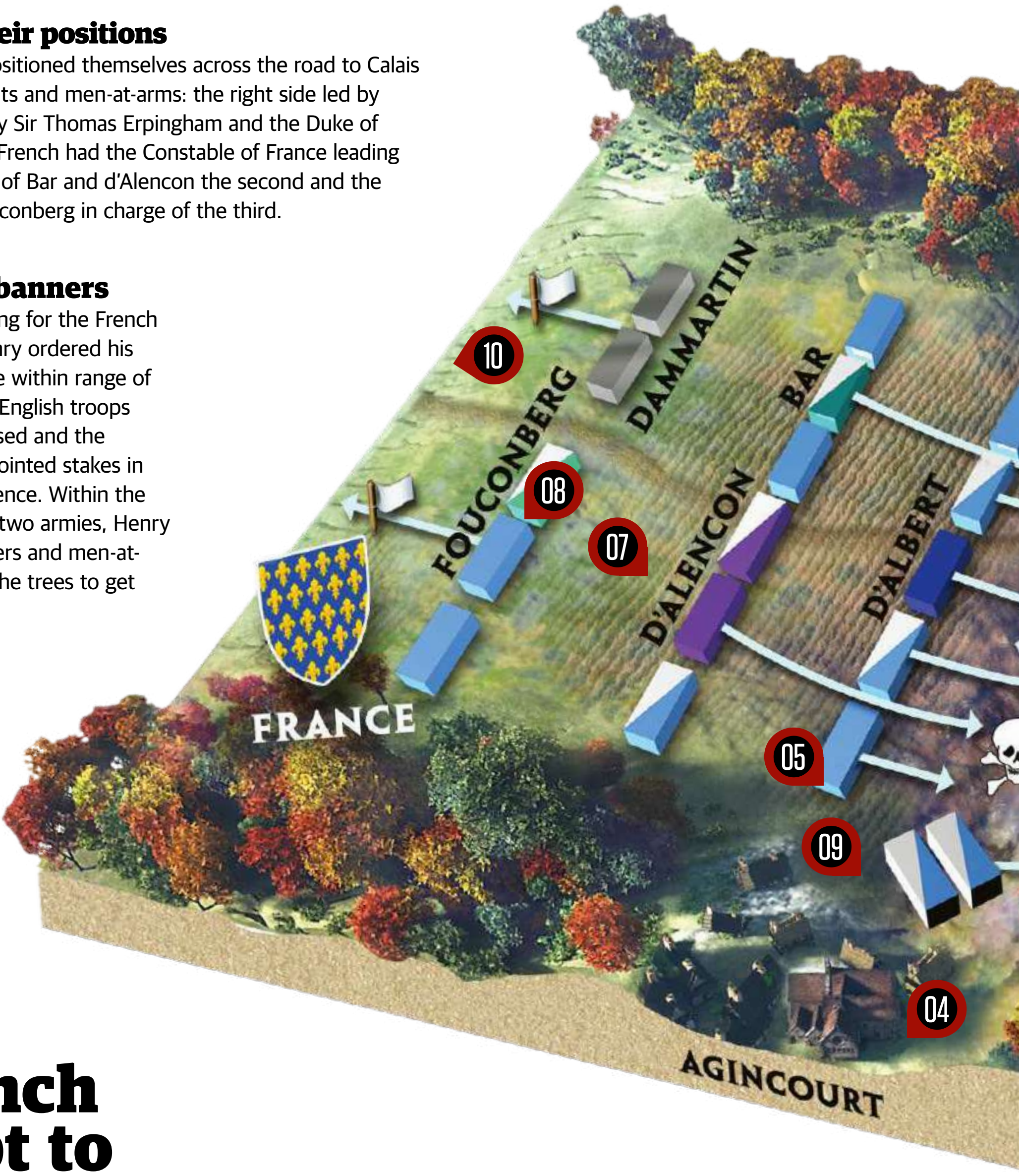
Shortly after, Henry gave the order for his archers to shoot the French, who were massed together in a big, unwieldy group. Taken by surprise, the French forces incurred very heavy casualties.

05 French attempt to move forward

After the shock of this assault, the French forces tried to advance in order to take the battle to the English. However, having already suffered massive casualties, they were impeded by the dead and dying horses and men already shot down in front of them. Reduced to walking pace, they were easily picked off by the English archers concealed in the woodlands on the flanks.

10 French camp ransacked

With the battle over and any local resistance crushed, the English troops ransacked the largely abandoned French camp, having secured a victory that would live on in legend.

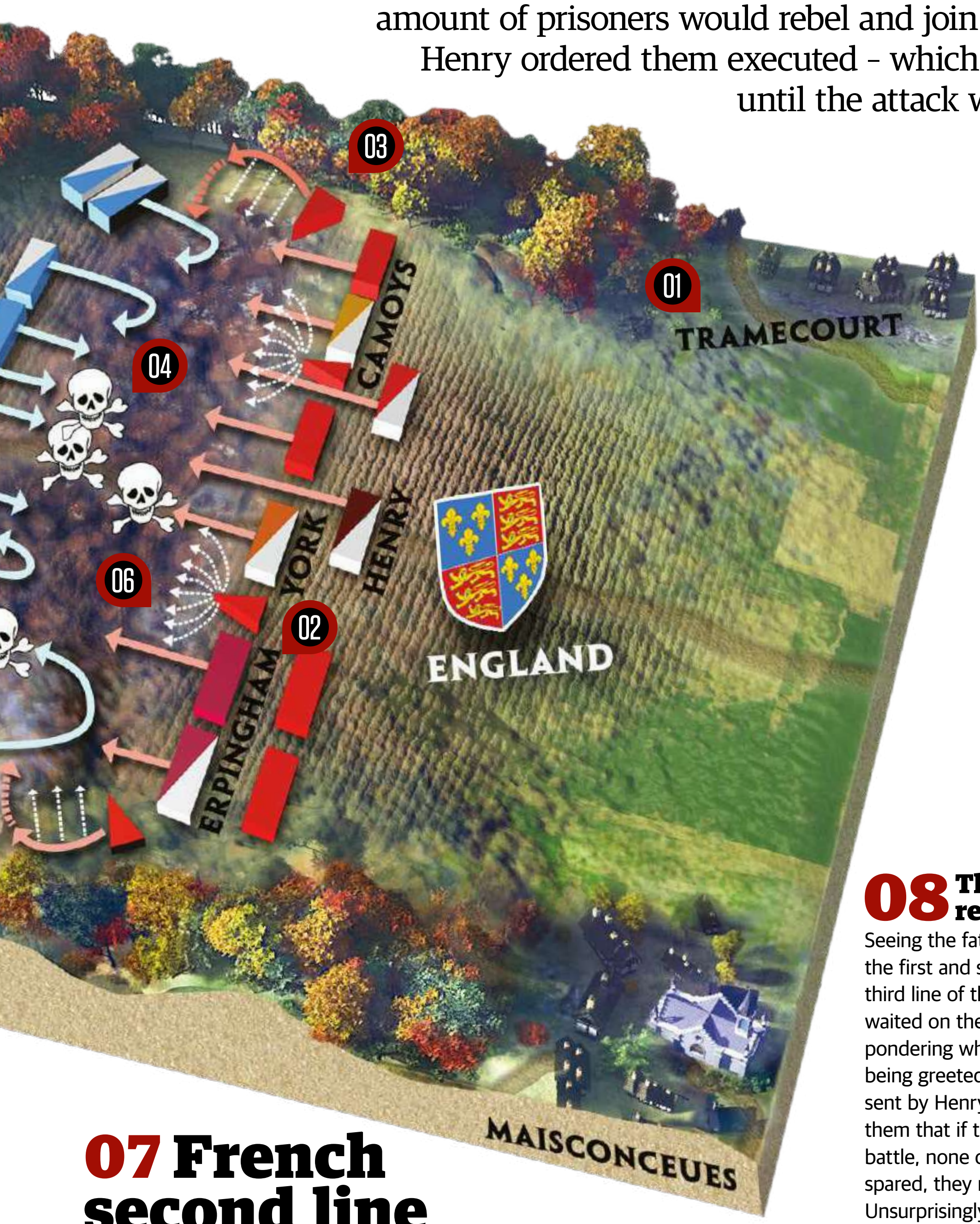


06 Archers join the fray and flanks

With the battle continuing along the fence of stakes, the English archers abandoned their positions and joined the knights in fighting against the French cavalry forces – most of which had been forced to dismount – which were reinforced by soldiers attacking on the flanks.

09 Local French force attacks baggage

Although the main battle was over, it threatened to reignite when a local French force circumvented the forest and attacked the English baggage. Fearing the substantial amount of prisoners would rebel and join this assault, Henry ordered them executed – which many were, until the attack was repelled.



08 Third line retreats

Seeing the fate that had met the first and second waves, the third line of the French forces waited on the edge of the field, pondering whether to join. After being greeted by a messenger sent by Henry, who informed them that if they joined the battle, none of them would be spared, they made their decision. Unsurprisingly, considering their options, they left the battlefield.

07 French second line moves forward

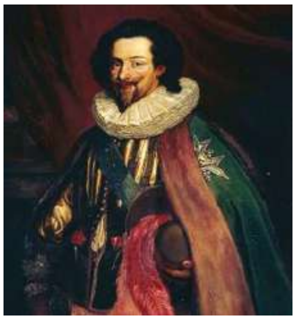
The French second line, led by D'Alencon, moved forward in earnest to assist the beleaguered first line, but was overwhelmed in a similar fashion. Seeing the futility in continuing, he attempted to surrender to Henry, but was killed before he could reach the king.

France

TROOPS 36,000

LONGBOWMEN 1,200

KNIGHTS 8,800



Charles d'Albret
Leader

The former Constable of France co-commanded the French army alongside Jean le Maingre.
Strengths Experienced soldier.
Weaknesses Low social rank, so orders were ignored by noblemen.

Knights
Key Unit

Much of the French forces consisted of heavy infantry, making them tough adversaries in open combat.
Strengths Heavily armoured and effective at hand-to-hand fighting.
Weaknesses Slow, cumbersome and easy to pick off by archers.

Horses
Key weapon

Large numbers of knights on horseback often presented a fearful sight for their opponents.
Strengths Fast and powerful opponents in battle.
Weaknesses Cramped and boggy locations made them useless.

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Joan of Arc

The teenage martyr who led the French army and put the fear of God into the English

A young woman whose faith led her to challenge kings and inspire armies, Joan of Arc's devout belief that God had appointed her to lead the French to victory against the British drove her from the village of her birth and onto the battlefield. In her brief time she became a national figurehead; a symbol. It was an image she cultivated and encouraged and one that would ultimately lead to her death.

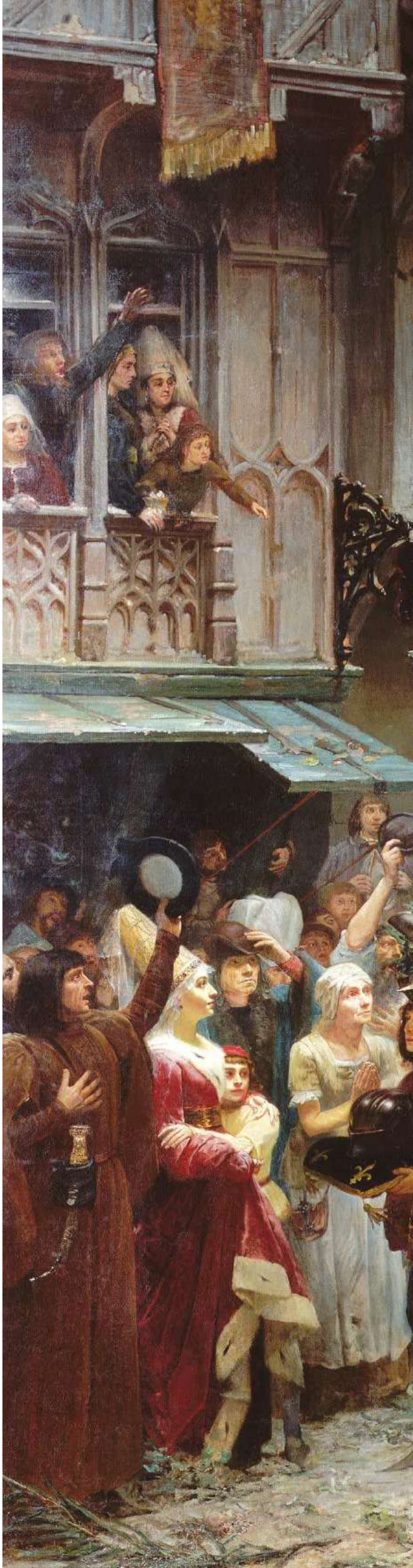
Flames secured Joan's martyrdom, just as they provoked her fierce patriotism. Jehanne D'Arc, or la Pucelle (the Maid) as she came to be known, was born in 1412 in the village of Domrémy, located across the river from Burgundy's territory. The Burgundians, allies of the British, regularly attacked French territory. In July 1428, Joan's family fled a raid and returned to find the enemy had burned their town, fields and church. Joan had heard angelic voices since the age of 12 or 13, urging her to remain pious, but now they gave her a specific mission. The voices of Archangel Michael, St Catherine and St Margaret directed her to go into France and find her king, the Dauphin Charles.

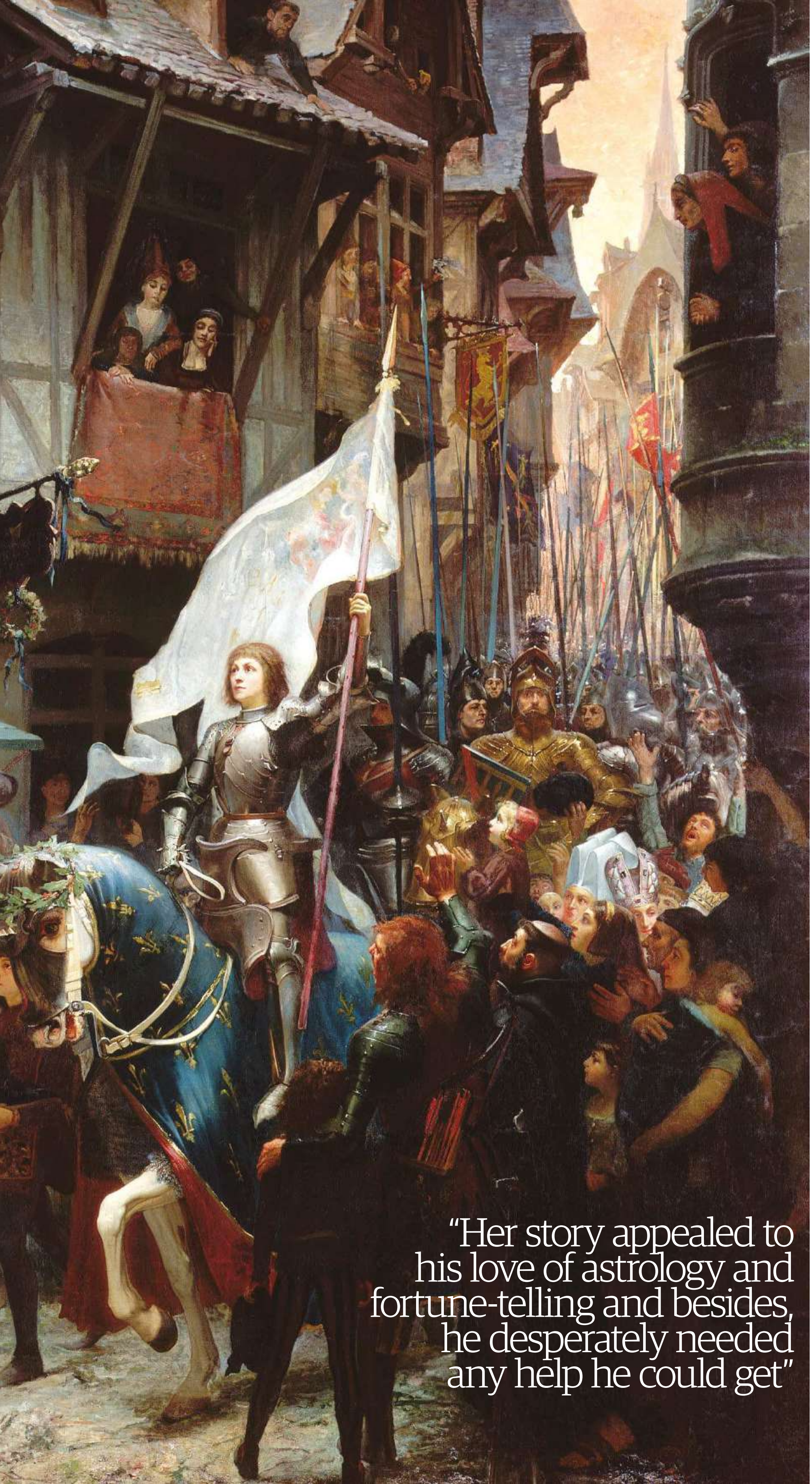
The alliance between Britain and Burgundy had kept Charles from claiming the French crown. His enemies not only occupied Paris, but also held the city of Reims, where coronations took place. The crown would have to wait, however, as the French city of Orléans was currently in the grip of a protracted siege. Orléans needed help and Joan believed she was the one to deliver it. On 13 May 1428, the sixteen-year-old arrived in Vaucouleurs and begged Robert de Baudricourt, the captain of the garrison, to give her a military escort to Charles' court at Chinon. Baudricourt replied that she should be taken home and beaten. However, Joan would not be deterred and returned in January the next year.

She claimed she was the subject of a prophecy from 1398, about a maid who would "deliver the kingdom of France from the enemy." Baudricourt turned her down again, but her efforts were gaining traction. She gained favour with local nobility, particularly the Duke of Lorraine. Although Joan refused to attempt to cure his gout, the Duke agreed to give her a small escort and in February she travelled in men's clothes to Chinon, where she was presented to the court.

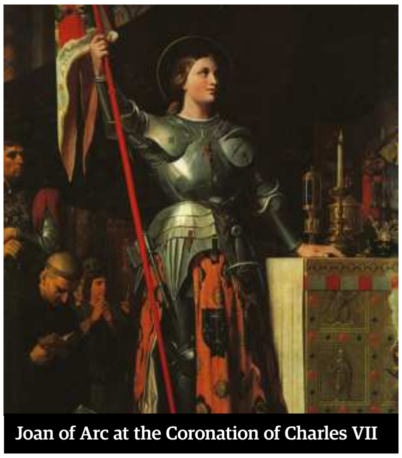
Charles was cautious but curious. Taking advice from a mad heretic could be devastating to his campaign, but her story appealed to his love of astrology and fortune-telling and besides, he desperately needed any help he could get. Joan immediately picked him out from the crowd and pledged her allegiance: "Most illustrious Lord Dauphin, I come and am sent from God to give assistance to you and the kingdom." He was impressed, but ordered she be tested before giving any official credence to her claims. One of the key figures in these trials was Yolande of Aragon, one of the true powers behind Charles and an intelligent strategist. After Joan's maidenhood was proved, she faced questions from clergy and theologians and passed with flying colours. Whether or not they truly believed in her voices was irrelevant. Charles now had a messenger of God, and Yolande raised a convoy for this messenger to lead.

She claimed to have her first vision at the age of 12, when St Catherine, St Michael and St Margaret appeared to her in a field





> “Her story appealed to his love of astrology and fortune-telling and besides, he desperately needed any help he could get”



Joan of Arc at the Coronation of Charles VII

Life in the time of Joan of Arc

The Black Death

From 1348 to 1350, the Black Death ravaged England, claiming the lives of some 1.5 million people. Carried by fleas, in turn carried by the rats infesting London, the bubonic plague spread through overpopulated towns and cities. England’s economy and resources would feel its effects for decades to come.

Emissaries from God

Joan of Arc was not the first woman to claim the heavenly host had spoken to her. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) railed against corruption in the clergy, St Clare of Assisi (1194-1253) claimed to be able to hear and see Mass on the wall of her room when she was too ill to move, and Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) travelled Italy urging states to make peace with Rome.

From bows to cannons

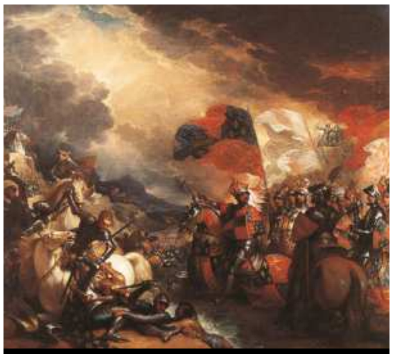
As the Hundred Years’ War raged on through the decades, the technology of warfare began to change. The English longbows at Agincourt in 1415 were the difference between victory and defeat, but as open battles were often replaced by lengthy sieges, cannon fire became a deciding factor. By the siege of Orléans, both sides deployed cannon.

Heresy trials

The definition of heresy covers a great deal of sins, but the term boils down to denying any established Christian dogma. In the Middle Ages, heresy trials became more common and the Catholic Church aggressively pursued any enemies. This continued into the 16th century, with Copernican scholars accused of heresy.

The Bavarian Hussites

Czech religious reformer Jan Huss was burned at the stake in 1415 for heresy. After his death, the Hussite movement was born, separating itself from Rome. The Hussites declared that communion should be given with bread and wine, they believed in poverty of the priesthood, punishment of sinners and freedom of preaching. The Pope announced a crusade against them in 1420.



Edward III, one of the instigators of the Hundred Years' War, crosses the Somme

The Hundred Years' War, 1337-1453

After William the Conqueror defeated Harold at Hastings in 1066 and claimed the English throne, English and Norman territories were combined. It was inevitably difficult to keep control of the taken land. By the reign of English King Edward III in 1327, only Gascony and Pontieu remained. When the French King Charles IV died heirless, Edward believed his mother and Charles' sister Isabella was the next in line, meaning the crown should be his. The French disagreed and chose Charles' cousin Philip. A furious Edward refused to pay homage and when Philip confiscated his lands in Aquitaine in retaliation, Edward declared war.

The Edwardian era of the Hundred Years' War lasted until 1360. The English captured Philip's successor, King John II, but a compromise wasn't reached until the Treaty of Brétigny, in which Edward agreed to abandon his claim in exchange for Aquitaine and Calais. War resumed in 1369 when Charles V of France responded to Edward the Black Prince refusing his summons by declaring war. Charles successfully reclaimed many of the territories his predecessor lost, and the Black Prince's son Richard II would make peace with Charles VI in 1389. After the truce had been repeatedly extended, war resumed in 1415 when Henry V invaded, leading to decades of conflict during which the English would take Paris and claim kingship. They would not be driven out until the Battle of Castillon in 1453, the official end of the Hundred Years' War.

In April 1429, Joan rode out, holding her white standard and wearing a suit of armour commissioned by Charles. She announced that her sword would be found in the church of Sainte-Catherine-de-Fierbois, hidden behind the altar. It was an old gift to the church from the crusades, and the discovery was treated as a miracle. Her pious conduct became renowned; she forced her soldiers to stop taking the Lord's name in vain and expelled prostitutes from their camps. She dictated letters to the British, instructing them to leave France or face the wrath of God. A canny propagandist, the Dauphin ensured these letters were copied and widely distributed.

However, Joan was still an untested military leader. She arrived at Orléans eager for battle but had not understood that her forces were there as support, nothing more. Although frustrated, she managed to get her men into the city, past the English troops and was rewarded with the adulation of the citizens. They may have been pleased to see her but her impatience to attack was at odds with her fellow commanders' strategy. In her frustration she hurled insults at the English from the battlements.

When an attack was decided upon on 4 May 1428, Joan was not even told by the commanders and woke up as the fight was in progress. She arrived just in time to rally her troops and inspire them to capture their target: the small fortress of Saint-Loup. It was their first victory and Joan's confidence grew. She dictated a fearsome final letter to the English, ordering them to leave, and on 6 May another attack was mounted. Joan led the attack herself, routing the enemy. She advanced again the next day, claiming to be the first to storm the ramparts at Les Tourelles, where she took an arrow to the shoulder but stayed in the fight. The French commanders credited her for inspiring the troops to victory. Orléans hadn't just been relieved; the English had been routed.

With Orléans free, Joan wanted Charles to proceed immediately to Reims but the Dauphin was more cautious. He wanted to clear the Loire valley and began raising money for the campaign. It would be a month before Joan would see combat again. Technically, the young Duke of Alençon led the army but he was a firm believer in the young female warrior and frequently deferred to her. They swept quickly through the English resistance and laid siege to Beaugency. The English surrendered without realising a relief force was on its way, a force the French promptly set off after. They met at Patay on 18 June, where the ill-prepared English were decimated, with over 2,000 dead and all but one senior officer captured.

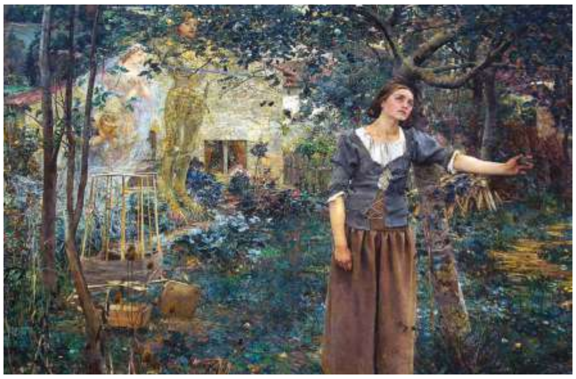
Joan sent many letters to British and Burgundian troops but she was illiterate and had to dictate them

"She dictated a fearsome final letter to the English, ordering them to leave, and on 6 May another attack was mounted. Joan led the attack herself, routing the enemy"

Defining moment

First vision 1424

At just 12 or 13 years old, she first claims to hear the voices of angels speaking to her. At first, the voices tell her to 'govern' her conduct. If she felt she had not behaved properly, the voices would admonish her. They also tell her to reject the marriage her family had arranged for her. Joan soon identifies the main voice as Michael, the archangel who led the battle against Satan in the Book of Revelation. As Joan grows older, Michael's messages continue to advise her toward piety, but gradually grow more political. Finally, Michael and the other voices, those of St Catherine and St Margaret, tell her to travel to France and begin her mission.



Timeline

1412

Birth of a warrior
Joan is born to a farming family in the town of Domrémy. She never receives formal education or learns how to read and write, instead learning about religion from her mother Isabelle.
1412

Domrémy burns
The territory across the river from Domrémy is Burgundian, and a raid into French territory proves a defining moment for Joan. Her family flees to Neufchateau and returns to find the enemy having burnt their town.
1428

Journey to Vaucouleurs
In 1428 Joan's voices tell her to travel to France and talk to the Dauphin, Charles. She travels to Vaucouleurs to demand an escort, beginning a series of attempts ending in success after convincing nobles that she is the fulfilment of a prophecy.
May 1428

Audience with the king
Joan is granted a meeting with the Dauphin, Charles, who sees value in her for his military campaign to free Orléans. Joan immediately identifies him in a room full of people and impresses him with her fervour.
6 March 1429

The sword is found
After convincing the clergy and theologians of her maidenhood and her gift, Joan is allowed to lead a force to Orléans. She announces that her sword can be found in the church of Saint Catherine-de-Fierbois, which it is.
April 1429

Joan dressed in men's clothes, claiming the spirits told her to. She also wore her hair short, but this is often not depicted in portraits

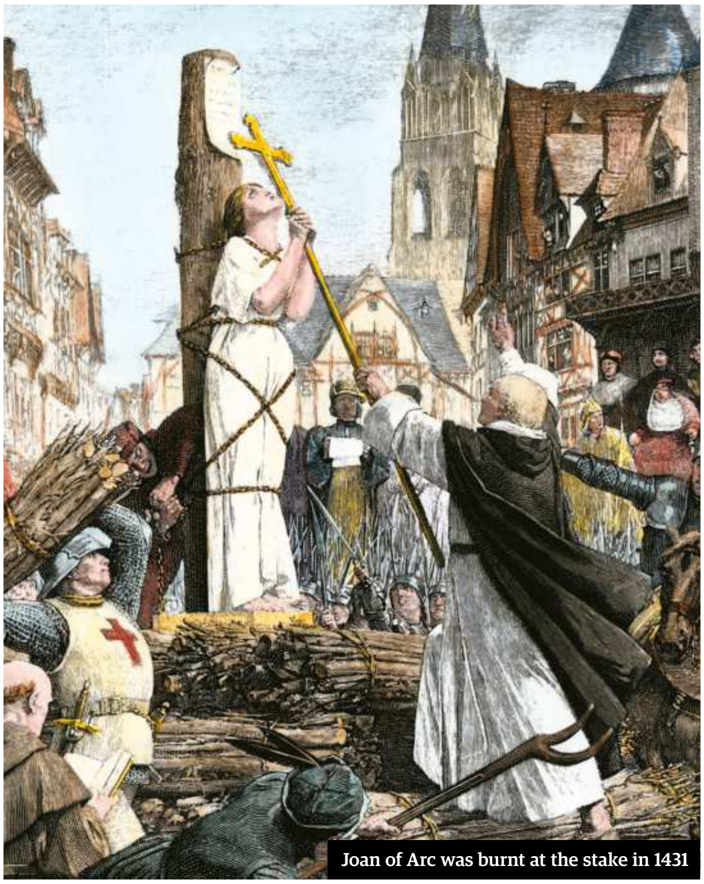
Joan played little part in it but by this point that mattered not, as her legend only grew stronger. By now, Charles was ready to head for Reims and the coronation. He led a grand procession, entered the city on 16 July and was crowned the next day as Joan looked on proudly. She was desperate for the king to attack Paris but he chose to leave Reims instead, only to be barred from crossing the Seine by English troops. Joan was ecstatic as she saw the only possible answer was an attack on Paris.

After skirmishes throughout August and a truce with Burgundy, on 8 September Joan finally led the Paris attack she has been itching for. She stood on the moat, demanding surrender, but the only reply she received was an English arrow through her leg. After hours of constant bombardment, her men reached her under the cover of darkness, but she was determined to continue the fight the next day. However, once Charles saw the number of French casualties he ordered her to return to his side.

The attack had failed and Joan's usefulness was now suddenly cast into doubt. She needed a victory to restore her reputation but in November 1429 failed to take the castle of La Charité after a long siege. On return to court, Charles gave her hereditary nobility but made sure she stayed with him, which frustrated Joan. It was her duty to be on the battlefield expelling the enemy from her home soil, not rotting in court.

By 1430, the English were preparing a full-scale invasion of France to reclaim their recently lost territory. When the city of Compiègne refused to surrender, Joan rode to support them without Charles' authorisation. On 23 May she led an attack from the city, but the English reinforcements cut her off at the rear and she could not retreat. She was pulled from her horse and forced to surrender to the Burgundians. She testified that constant sexual harassment was the reason she remained in men's clothing, while the voices in her head told her not to escape. Defying them, she leapt from the tower but was injured in the fall and promptly recaptured.

The English needed to make an example of Joan and the Parisian theologians wanted to try her for heresy, idolatry and witchcraft. She needed to answer for the way in which she had circumvented the church by claiming to receive her instructions from her 'voices' while her ability to inspire followers had to be stopped. If she were convicted by a foreign power the damage to Charles' reputation would be severe, so the French court paid the Duke of Burgundy £10,000 for her.


Joan of Arc was burnt at the stake in 1431

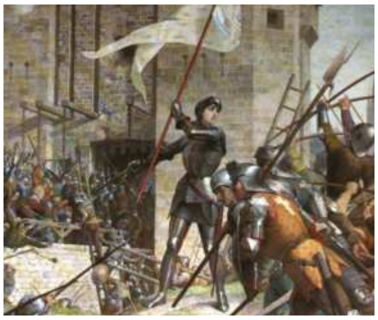
Six rounds of questioning took place between 21 February and 3 March 1431, with nine more between 10 and 17 March, conducted in her cell. Joan never changed her story. On 24 May, she was taken to the scaffold and told that if she did not abjure, she would be given to the secular authorities that would carry out her death sentence. Joan wavered as the sentence began to be read out. In front of the crowd, she recanted and was sentenced to life imprisonment and to wear women's clothes.

Two days later Joan changed her mind. Demanding she be allowed to attend mass, Joan was found in men's clothes, claiming the voices had told her that her abjuration was treason. Now the only possible outcome was her execution. On 30 May she was allowed to make her confession and take communion before she was taken to the Old Market in Rouen and tied to the stake. She was given a small crucifix and a Dominican priest held a parish cross high so she could see it even as the flames began to lick around her. The young warrior who had led her country to such great victories over the English cried out, "Jesus!" repeatedly before leaving this world. The king she had helped crown, Charles VII, not once tried to help Joan throughout her ordeal. She was merely a tool that had stopped being useful. However, the legend of Jehanne la Pucelle only grew stronger with time. In 1456, after a lengthy investigation, the sentence was annulled and in 1920, Joan of Arc was canonised by Pope Benedict XV.

Defining moment

Siege of Orléans 29 April-8 May 1429

Joan arrives at Orléans amid great fanfare from the citizens of the city but is met with indifference by her fellow commanders. She is determined to mount an attack as soon as possible but is told they would wait for a relief effort. She is so poorly regarded by the other generals that when a sortie takes place, she's not told beforehand. Instead, she races out and joins the attack just in time to rally the flagging troops, ultimately claiming a fortress. This will be the first in a series of victories that would liberate Orléans and confirm her status for many as a heaven-sent heroine.



1456

Charles is crowned
After swiftly clearing the Loire region of English resistance, Charles finally travels to Reims where he is crowned King Charles VII of France. The coronation fulfils another part of the prophecy of Joan's voices.
17 July 1429

A failed siege
Following Charles' coronation, Joan is convinced that Paris will fall. However, the siege fails as 1,500 men fall to the English bombardment, with Joan herself wounded, having to be pulled from the battlefield under nightfall.
8 September 1429

Capture
While leading an unsanctioned relief effort of Compiègne, Joan decides to attack the Burgundian troops surrounding the city. She is cut off by the English and pulled from her horse while trying to escape.
23 March 1430

Trial
Needing to regain superiority, the church interrogates Joan, telling her she can abjure or face a secular court that will execute her. She retracts her statement, only to change her mind days later, stating she'd rather die than deny what she knows to be true.
9 January-24 May 1431

Burned to death
Having recanted her abjuration, Joan is sentenced to be burned at the stake. A Dominican priest holds a cross up high enough for her to see from the flames. She calls out "Jesus!" several times as she burns to death.
30 May 1431

Late justice
Charles orders that Joan's trial be investigated, a proceeding taking roughly six years to complete. Finally, in 1456, the original verdict is annulled, deciding the process had been unjust.
1456

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CHURCH & STATE

The Medieval period saw the Church wield incredible power over everyone from monarchs to the peasantry

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The Church became one of the most powerful forces of the Middle Ages

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The legendary scholar believed religion and science could coexist

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The father of Europe and the first leader of the Holy Roman Empire

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The story of the mighty sultan's total victory against the Franks

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King Richard fanatically led the quest to claim the fabled Holy Land

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In seven years the Order was hunted, dismantled and executed

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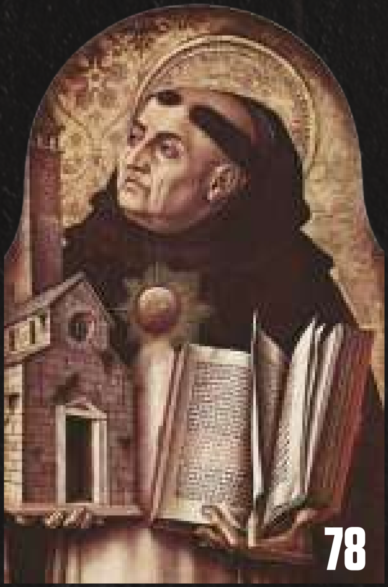
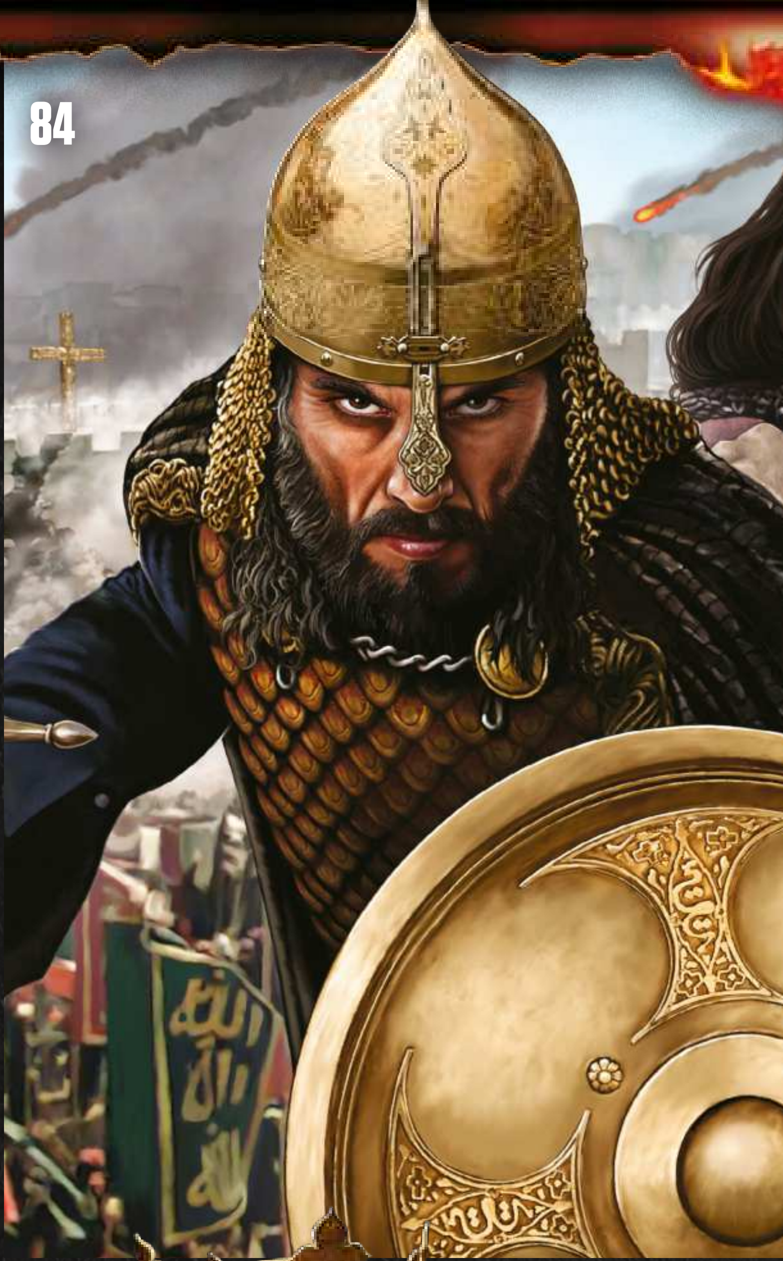
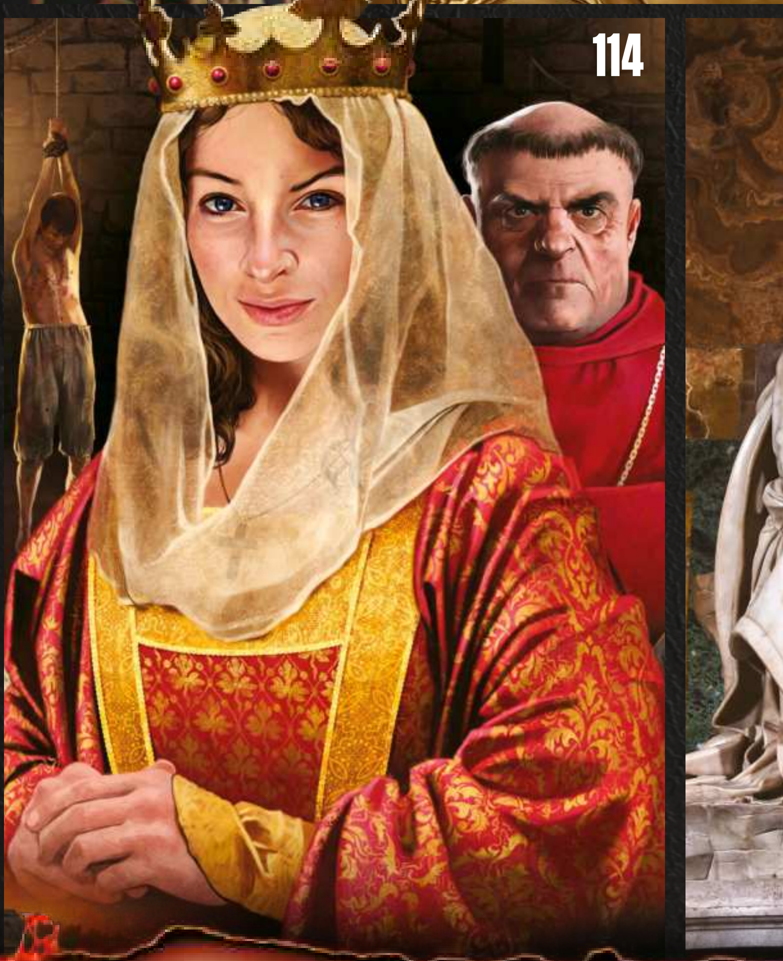
Uncover the origins of one of Europe's bloodiest persecutions







92

106

80

74

102

Rise of the holy empire

The dominant institution in the lives of kings and peasants alike, the Church promised heavenly salvation to all yet frequently delivered Earthly schism

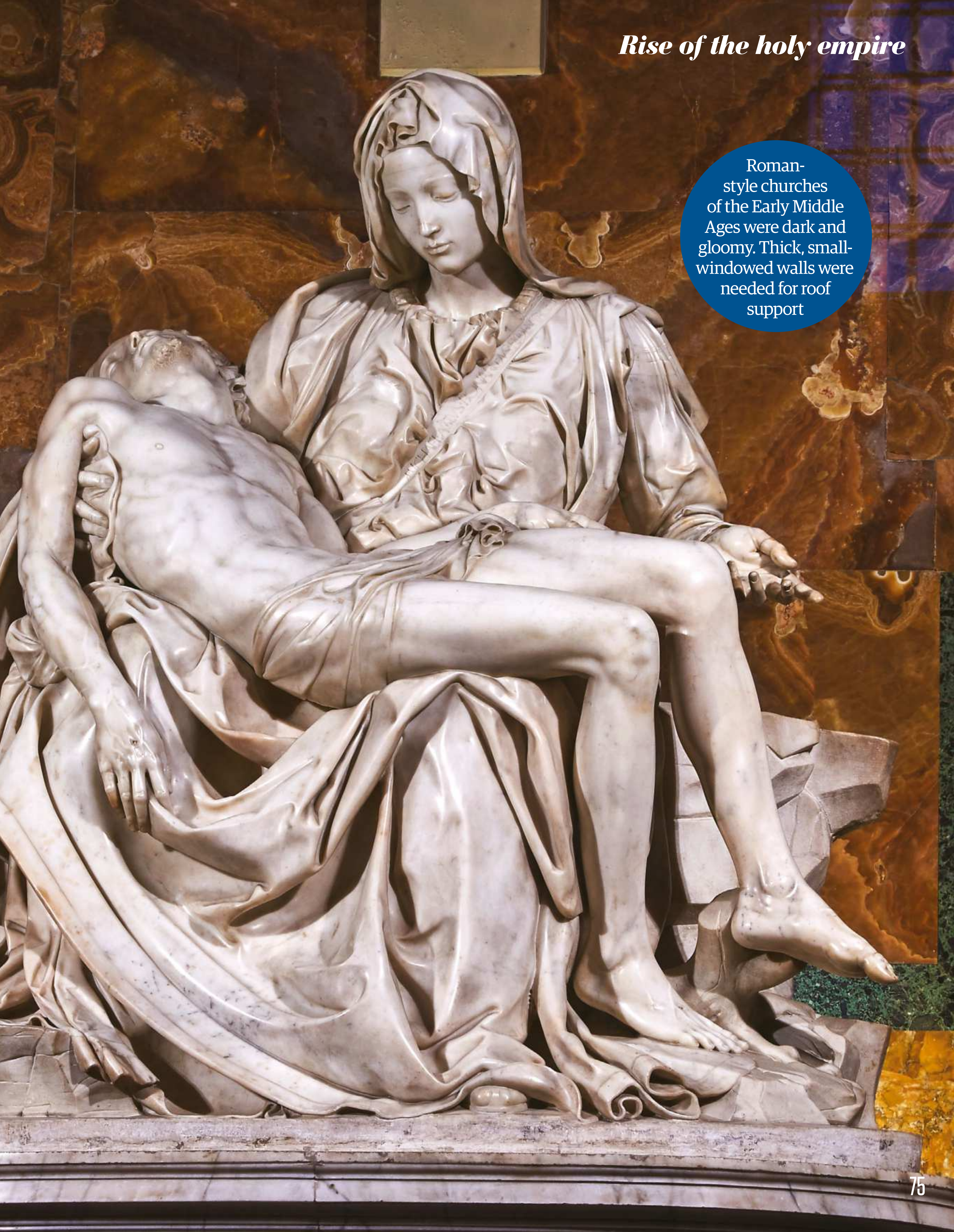
For the majority of the population in western Europe, life in Medieval times was unremittingly grim and frequently short. Death was a constant shadow; if poverty, famine or pestilence didn't carry you off, there were plenty of warmongering emperors and kings looking for battlefield expendables. Yet one organisation offered some semblance of reassurance that everything was not forlorn or futile - the Church.

Its message was simple: no matter how horrible a life was on Earth, if the person living it followed the teachings of Christ, a heavenly reward was assured. Conversely, living a sinful, wicked life meant being cast down into hell for eternity. The hope of salvation or the expectation of damnation gave the church considerable power over the hearts and minds of people. It dominated the lives of rich and poor alike, essentially from cradle to grave, in that baptism, worship, marriage, and burial after death most usually took place either in holy establishments or on hallowed grounds.

The Church was one of the few outlets for education too. There weren't many people in the Middle Ages who were able to read and write. Those that could were often priests, monks in monasteries or nuns in convents, who naturally taught from their own religious texts, perpetuating those beliefs.

To be a Christian in western Europe in those times was to be a Catholic as, unlike today, it was the only religion of the period that believed in the risen Christ. As the conversion of pagans to Christianity spread across Europe through the early centuries, so the Church grew in numbers and influence. It acquired lands, developed its own laws and collected taxes. Its centre was Rome at the heart of the Western Roman Empire, while at its head was the pope, believed to be a successor of Saint Peter, the founder of the Catholic Church.

Other important early outposts were at Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria, all in the Eastern Roman Empire, which was also known as the Byzantine Empire. While this contracted or expanded over the centuries, remaining relatively intact until 1453, Rome stayed the primary centre of the Catholic Church despite the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476. The spread of Christianity continued apace after this date, however, even into areas that had been



Roman-style churches of the Early Middle Ages were dark and gloomy. Thick, small-windowed walls were needed for roof support beyond Roman control previously. Key groups of pagans, such as the Franks in Germany who converted en masse in 496, regularly turned to Catholicism. Some time in the second half of the 5th century, Saint Patrick landed in Ireland to introduce Christianity there. In 596, Pope Gregory I, often known as Saint Gregory the Great, sent a mission to Britain to convert the Anglo-Saxons - pagan tribes who had invaded and settled after the Romans had left - with great success.

Yet as the area of Catholic influence and power in western Europe grew, to the extent that no king or emperor could ignore it, invasions into its sphere from hostile tribes nevertheless took place. In 772, for example, the pagan Lombards marched deep into papal territory, threatening Rome. The pope at the time, Adrian I, called for help from the king of the Franks, Charlemagne. By that time, he had expanded his territory to include modern-day France, Germany, Northern Italy and beyond. Charlemagne's army swiftly defeated the Lombards, underlining the role of the Franks as papal protectors.

Under Charlemagne, the Catholics were also ruthless in forcing conquered tribes to embrace Christianity or be put to death. At Verden, Saxons who had previously submitted to Charlemagne attempted to rebel. This act incurred biblical-level wrath from the Frankish king when he had 4,500 of them beheaded.

In 800, a subsequent pope, Leo III, called for Charlemagne's support when he was accused of being unfit for papal office. Entering Rome in December, Charlemagne backed Leo, and the plotters were exiled. In gratitude, and in acknowledgment of the leader's importance, on Christmas Day at Saint Peter's Basilica, Leo crowned Charlemagne emperor of what would later be known as the Holy Roman Empire.

> "The extent of papal authority greatly vexed the Eastern Roman Empire"

At the time, this caused no small amount of resentment in the Eastern Roman Empire. There, Irene of Athens, the de facto empress of the Byzantine Empire, already had claim to that title. Yet this was just one of a number of contentious issues between the two regions.

Matters really came to a head some 200 years later. By then, the Latin-speaking West and the Greek-speaking East contained very few individuals who could speak and write both languages. As basic communication became more difficult, cultural unity suffered too, giving rise to different approaches to religious doctrines. One such doctrine concerned the filioque clause in the Nicene Creed, and that, along with a dispute over the extent of papal authority, were the two principle reasons for the event known as the Great Schism of 1054.

The Nicene Creed is the statement of faith made by Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and other Christian churches. It was named after the First Council of Nicaea, held in 325, when the statement was formulated. Its wording was revised after the First Council of Constantinople in 381. The third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431 reaffirmed the Creed in its second format, but specifically forbade making any further alterations to it.

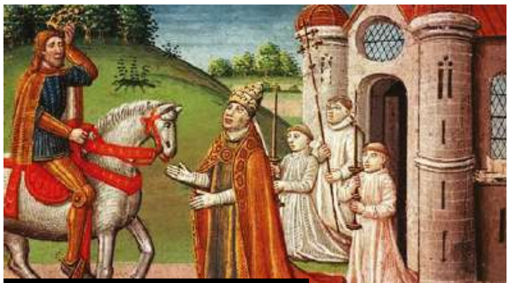
However, after the Synod of Toledo in Spain in 589, Western churches included the filioque clause, which translated from Latin means 'and the son', to a section of the Creed. The amended section now stated, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son." Eastern churches were categorically opposed to that inclusion.

> Monasteries and convents - as nuns took the same vows as monks - offered health services, taking care of the sick

The extent of papal authority also greatly vexed the Eastern Roman Empire. They accepted that the head of the Roman Church, the pope, had primacy over the other four early Church outposts in the east, but maintained this was at an honorary level only, and that he had no direct authority over them, or their congregations.

Ultimately, centuries of dispute and rancour fuelled by political jealousies and vested interests came to a head in 1054. Mutual excommunications served by the pope, Leo IX, and the head of the Church in Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, led to a formal split. The Roman Catholic Church became separate from the Eastern Orthodox Church along doctrinal, theological, linguistic, political and geographical lines.

Several attempts at reconciliation were made, but during the Fourth Crusade in 1204, Constantinople was attacked by Western Crusaders. The Church



Charlemagne And The Pope, by Antoine Verard, from 1493, when Adrian I requested military help

Defining moment

The venerable Bede 735

The death of Saint Bede brings to an end the life of an important 8th-century scholar and writer. A Benedictine monk, his works include books on science, religion and history. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History Of The English People* will become one of the foremost primary sources of English history. Chronicler monks like Bede allow monasteries in the Middle Ages to become centres of learning. There, libraries of painstakingly hand-written volumes - with book printing being more than 500 years away - are assembled. Without such endeavour by people such as Bede, we would know far less about the history of the period.

Defining moment

Murder most foul 1170

A group of knights brutally slay the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, at the altar of Canterbury Cathedral. King Henry II is suspected of inciting the murder even though Becket was formerly his friend. The monarch had previously appointed him chancellor, and as archbishop as well; he hoped Becket would keep the church in check. Yet the 'turbulent priest' put God before king and refused to implement Henry's religious reforms. The clash between church and state brings about Becket's death. Later, Henry is penitent, while reports of miracles at the victim's tomb are spread, and pilgrimages to it begin, leading to Becket's sainthood.

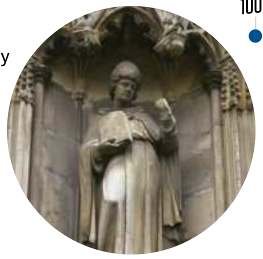
Timeline

496

A key conversion
Clovis I, the first king of the Franks to unite the Frankish tribes under one ruler, converts to Christianity, allowing for widespread conversions among his people.
496

597

Holy mission
Sent by Pope Gregory I, St Augustine leads a party of about 30 monks to England and becomes the first archbishop of Canterbury after founding the English Catholic Church.
597



1008

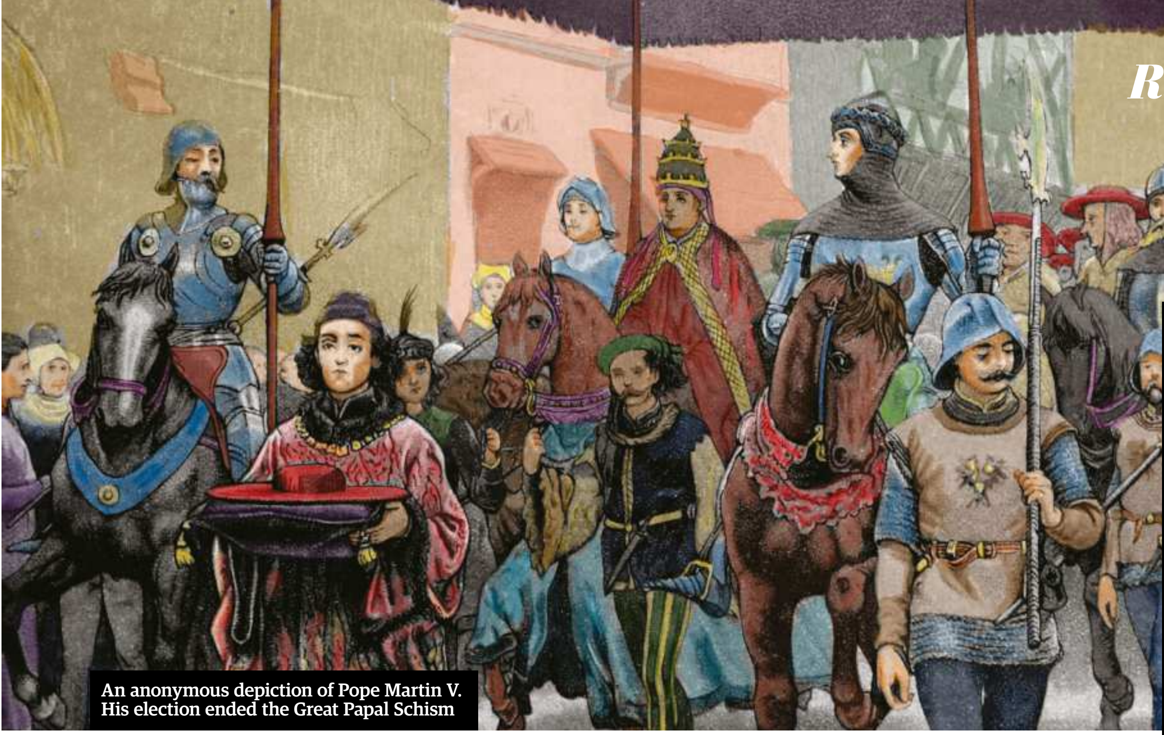
Converting a continent
Sweden's king converts to Christianity and his people follow. After Russia converts in 988, Poland in 966, Denmark in 960 and Bulgaria in 846, much of Europe is now Christian.
1008

1054

Christianity torn asunder
Leo IX's death in April doesn't stop his deposition, carrying a papal bull of excommunication, travelling to Constantinople. Meetings with patriarch Michael Cerularius fail, the bull is severed - Rome and Constantinople irrevocably divide.
1054

1099

To The Holy Land
The First Crusade captures Jerusalem. Briefly a Christian kingdom is founded upon it, but Jerusalem is retaken by Saladin in 1187 and the last Crusader stronghold, Acre, is lost in 1291.
1099


An anonymous depiction of Pope Martin V. His election ended the Great Papal Schism

of the Holy Wisdom there was looted, while it and other churches were converted to Roman Catholic worship. The assault struck at the heart of the Byzantine Empire, deepening the rift between East and West. Each side claims to be "the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church," and the schism remains in place today.

Another crisis, often confusingly also referred to as a Great Schism, began in 1378. More accurately it was a Great Papal Schism, and occurred after Pope Clement V moved his court to Avignon in 1309. Previous popes had clashed with Philip IV, the increasingly influential King of France, and when Clement, a Frenchman, took office, he refused to move to Rome. Subsequent popes, all French, remained in Avignon until Pope Gregory XI took the decision to return his court to Rome in 1377. However, he died barely a year later, with a number of his cardinals still resident in Avignon.

Many in Rome feared Gregory's successor would be a Frenchman who would take the papacy back to Avignon. A confused, discordant conclave finally chose an Italian, Urban VI, as the new pope. Yet he quickly lambasted the cardinals for their behaviour and attitudes to the extent that some believed, corrupted by power, he was unfit for office. With French cardinals needing little enough excuse to rebel, they declared Urban's election invalid. Instead they voted for one of their number, Clement VII. He took up office in Avignon while Urban stayed in power in Rome. Clement naturally had the support of France, Castile in Spain, and Scotland. Predictably perhaps, France's old enemy England sided with Urban, along with much of the German empire. Christendom was divided yet again.

Upon the death of the incumbents, new popes were elected to both seats of power. The situation got messier when, in 1410, a Church Council Of Pisa, assembled to find a solution, instead elected a third line of popes beginning with Alexander V.

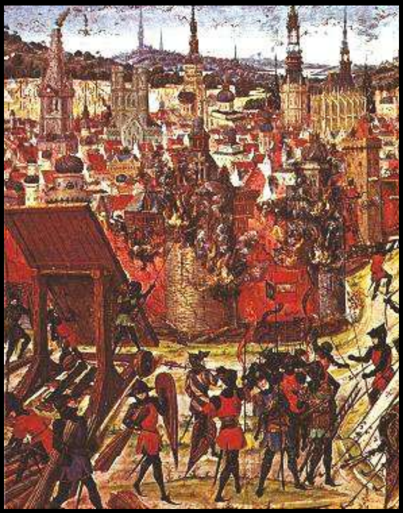
It was not until the Council Of Constance, which was convened from 1414-18 that a solution was finally thrashed out. The council was summoned by Alexander's successor, John XXIII, and at it, he himself was dismissed. The final Avignon pope, Benedict XIII was also dismissed, while Rome's Gregory XII resigned. The council then elected Martin V to be the sole pope going forward.

There was to be but a short respite from schism. Barely 100 years later, Christendom faced a further crisis – when Martin Luther set in motion the Protestant Reformation.

Defining moment

The pre-eminent pope 1198

Innocent III takes office and faces numerous crises, yet he handles each of them shrewdly, leading many to argue he is the most important pope of the Middle Ages. In his dealings with the Papal States, and with the crowned heads of Europe, he raises his position's power and authority to its height. Angered when the Fourth Crusade diverts to sack Constantinople, moving to excommunicate those responsible, he is nevertheless unable to undo the harm it causes to East-West relations. In his later years he presides over the important Fourth Lateral Council, which introduces far-reaching reforms to practices within the church.



The Crusades

Despite the recent East-West schism in Christianity, the leader of the Byzantine Empire, Alexius I, requested help from Pope Urban II in resisting Muslim incursions into his territory. Urban decided to do more than 'help'; in 1095, he ordered a large invasion force to not simply defend the Byzantine Empire, but to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Lands from what he saw as Muslim occupiers. The Crusades had begun.

Definitions vary, but generally there are considered to have been nine major Crusades fought between 1096 and 1291, in addition to an unnumbered series of smaller ones. Ultimately, they all failed. The first, instigated as a Christian war by Urban, who proclaimed it offered full penance for those taking part, may also have been an attempt by him to heal the divisions of the recent schism. However, subsequent crusades aggressively attacked other religions besides Muslims. Even fellow Christians fell to Crusader swords when Constantinople was attacked in the fourth endeavour. As they descended further into indiscriminate slaughter of innocents, the papacy lost moral authority and European Christendom unity suffered.

Nevertheless, contact with the advanced Muslim culture of the time delivered advances in science, mathematics, medicine, philosophy and art to the West.

1210

A new order
The Franciscan Friars are founded by Saint Francis, a rich man who gave his fortune away to live a holy life. The order forsakes monasteries, taking God's word out to the people.
1210

1260

As it was then…
Mostly constructed in the preceding 65 years, the Chartres Cathedral is consecrated. The magnificent structure, largely unchanged since consecration, is one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture.
1260

1309

All roads lead to Avignon
The reign of Avignon-based popes begins. Sometimes called the 'Babylon Captivity of Popes', it leads to the Great Papal Schism, which is not resolved until Martin V's ordination in 1417.
1309

1455

Spreading God's word
Employing a system of moveable metal type arranged in words and lines, Johannes Gutenberg prints copies of the Bible. Printed in Latin, it is the first book to be mass-produced in the Western world.
1455

1498

Upheaval ahead
Italian friar Savonarola is put to death after heavily criticising the Church for laxity and luxury, yet others, such as Martin Luther, are also set to challenge Catholicism as never before in the tumultuous times ahead.
1498

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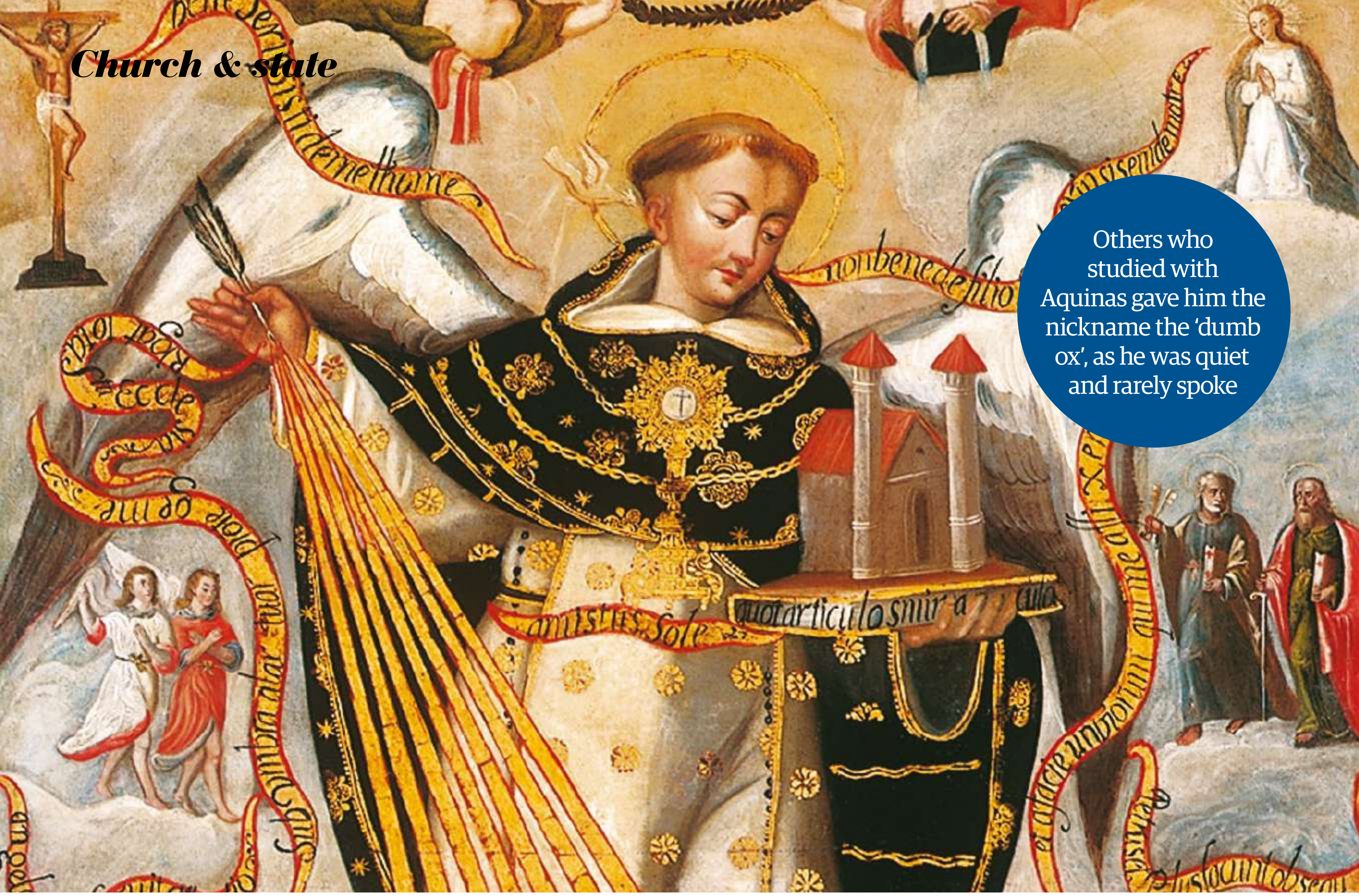


Others who studied with Aquinas gave him the nickname the 'dumb ox', as he was quiet and rarely spoke

Saint Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas believed religion and science could live in harmony and left a legacy of reason within the Catholic faith

As Thomas Aquinas was abducted on his way to study in Paris, he might have wondered quite how, in his life devoted to the pursuit of God, he had found himself kidnapped by his own parents. Aquinas had been born into a Catholic family of comfortable feudal standing, in Aquino (modern day Lazio, Italy) and had been offered by his family to the abbey of Monte Cassino, near his home, as a prospective monk in 1230, while still very young. His parents may well have hoped that he would rise through the monastic ranks to become an abbot - but Thomas was set to achieve much greater things. He spent nine years at the abbey, enjoying the life of spiritual devotion and cultural enrichment. But the Holy Roman emperor of the time, Frederick II, had long been in conflict with the pope, and eventually expelled the monks of Monte Cassino, in fear of their obedience at the pope's commands.

Thomas was then sent to the emperor's recently founded university, the University of Naples, where he was to find the passion for science and philosophy that would define his life's work. Here, he discovered translations of works from Greek and Arabic on philosophy, which exposed him to ideas that he had not previously imagined. This new learning was a great motivator in his eventual decision to join the recently founded Dominican order, who held democracy and teaching above the manual labour and life of prayer favoured by the government-controlled monks. His parents, who had long hoped for his success in the traditional monastic life, were not pleased, and were even less so when he was sent to Paris by the university, in a bid by his superiors in Naples to remove him

Monte Cassino Abbey, where Aquinas spent his early years as a prospective monk

from the clutches of his disapproving family, and to allow him to further his studies. But their plan was scuppered, and Aquinas' family had him seized and taken into captivity on his way to the French capital.

While many might bend to the will of their family after a dramatic abduction such as this, Thomas stubbornly held to his beliefs and refused to give up his plans. After a year of imprisonment at the hands of his own flesh and blood, during which time he taught his sisters and reportedly repulsed the attempts by his brothers to hire a prostitute to seduce him into temptation, he was freed in 1245, and set off once again to pursue his religious calling.

> Aquinas was afraid of storms throughout his life, possibly as a result of his sister dying after being struck by lightning

Aquinas eventually arrived in Paris, and once there, he enrolled at the convent of Saint-Jacques, a great Dominican university, and began to study under Albertus Magnus, a renowned scholar of wide intellectual expertise. They would, together, study the translated works of Aristotle and consider the possibility of the integration of these ideas into the Catholic faith, as the opposing ideas expressed by reason and science were beginning to create fear within the church. Authorities within the church, and within other religions, even tried to suppress the naturalism and rationalism that were emerging as a result of the rediscovery of these ancient Aristotelian ideas. Thomas Aquinas studied the new works at length, and lectured and wrote on the ways in which both science and religion could exist together.

In 1259, Aquinas became theological adviser and lecturer to the papal Curia, which meant assisting in the governance of the Catholic Church. This led him to return to Italy, where he taught at a convent in Rome, and then to the papal Curia in Viterbro. In 1268, he was swiftly moved to Paris, to weigh in on a defining argument that was unfolding there.

The works of Aristotle that had been so central to Aquinas' understanding and work in the realms of religion and reason had also been discovered by the Parisian masters, along with the works of Averroës, an Arabic philosopher in Spain, who had interpreted the Ancient Greek philosopher's words. In them, he found two fundamental concepts of truth - one religious, and one rational, but both equally valid. The dualism of faith and reason was not accepted by the Muslim faith, who suppressed the work of Averroës, and the Catholic faith was not keen to adopt it either. But Aquinas recognised this as a breakthrough. He discussed the two truths as 'natural law' - that is, the law of the world around us, visible to anybody, whether they have faith or not, and 'eternal law' - the law of God, only understood by those with faith and explaining a different plane of being to natural law.

He protested against the theologians who disagreed with him, but his theories were discredited along with those of Averroës in 1270. Aquinas had recognised the suppression of reasoned thought within the Muslim faith that had come from refusing to accept this duality, and had looked for a solution. But his theories created a division in the church that continues in some form to this day, between those who believe that reason is a force of confusion within the realms of faith.

Despite this, his extensive periods of teaching and publishing of seminal works, meant that Thomas Aquinas was canonised and made the patron saint of teachers. Those who follow his teachings today are called 'Thomists', and his legacy forms a vital part of the Dominican order to this day.

Did he levitate?

One of the best-known aspects of the story of Thomas Aquinas is that he was said, in moments of inspiration, deep prayer and excitement, to possess the ability to levitate. The claim is backed up by testimonies from monks who claim to have found him while he prayed, defying gravity and floating above the ground. Aquinas also claimed to have had visions of the Virgin Mary, who told him that he would not be a bishop - a welcome relief for Aquinas. The reports of these miracles helped make the case for him to be sainted after death.

Aquinas' handwriting was famously terrible, but he had many secretaries to whom he could dictate

The works of Thomas Aquinas

Summa Contra Gentiles

In this piece, Thomas Aquinas attempts to persuade non-believers of the reasonable nature of Christianity, and thus convert them. It is much simpler than his famous later work, *Summa Theologica*, and rather than rationalising the existence of God, instead attempts to convince the reader of the merits of religion.

Contra Errores Graecorum

The title of this work translates as 'Against the errors of the Greeks'. It was written in 1263 and the title was not given by Aquinas himself. It is not an attack on the Eastern Orthodox Church, but rather a defence against misunderstandings between them and the Catholic Church.

Summa Theologica

Here, Thomas Aquinas describes a key theory, the 'five ways' (quinque viae), aiming to prove the existence of God. They are: God is simple, without body or parts. God is perfect, lacking nothing. God is infinite, not limited by space or intellect. God is immutable. God is one, so the essence of God is its existence.

Commentaries On Aristotle

Not surprisingly, given his devotion to Aristotle's work, Aquinas wrote many works commenting on Aristotle's own writings. These included commentaries on: *Posterior Analytics*, *On Sense and What is Sensed*, *Memory and Recollection*, *Meteorology*, *On Interpretation*, *On Generation and Corruption*, and *On the Heavens and Earth*.

On Kingship To The King Of Cyprus

In this work, Thomas Aquinas considers questions of leadership, such as what the best form of government is, what separates a king from a tyrant, and is government a force for good or evil? The piece was dedicated to the king of Cyprus of the time, for his own study, not as a slight on his leadership.

Charlemagne

The 'father of Europe' and ruler of much of France and Germany, Charlemagne made his name as a king but left a legacy as the first Roman emperor since the 5th century

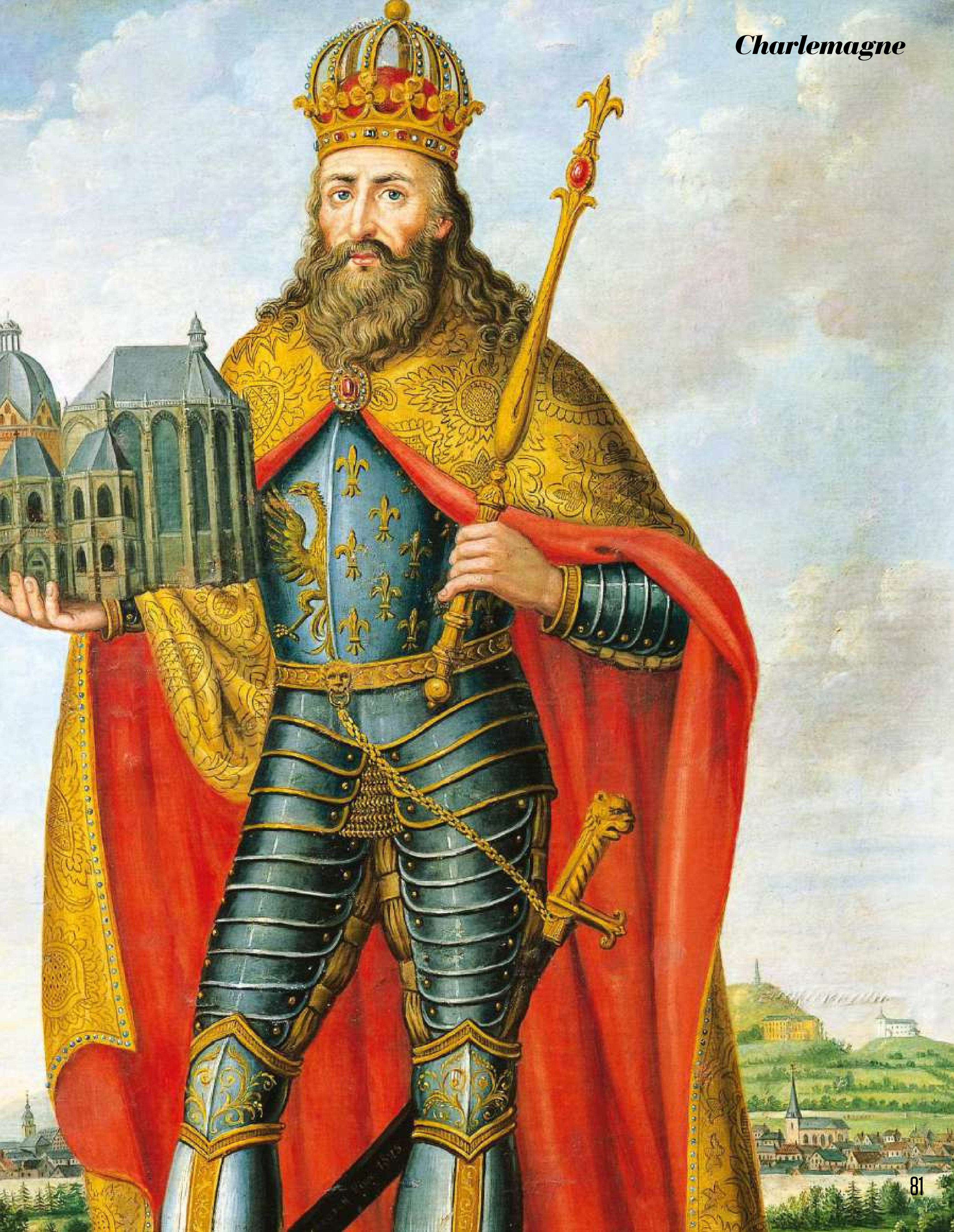
Over 300 years, Europe had fallen into darkness. With the power of the Pope and the once mighty Roman Church beset by enemies, the legacy of the western Roman Empire toppled as steadily and as surely as the Caesars had themselves, stability withdrawing like overstretched legionnaires and knowledge fading away like the crumbling Roman roads that cross-hatched the continent.

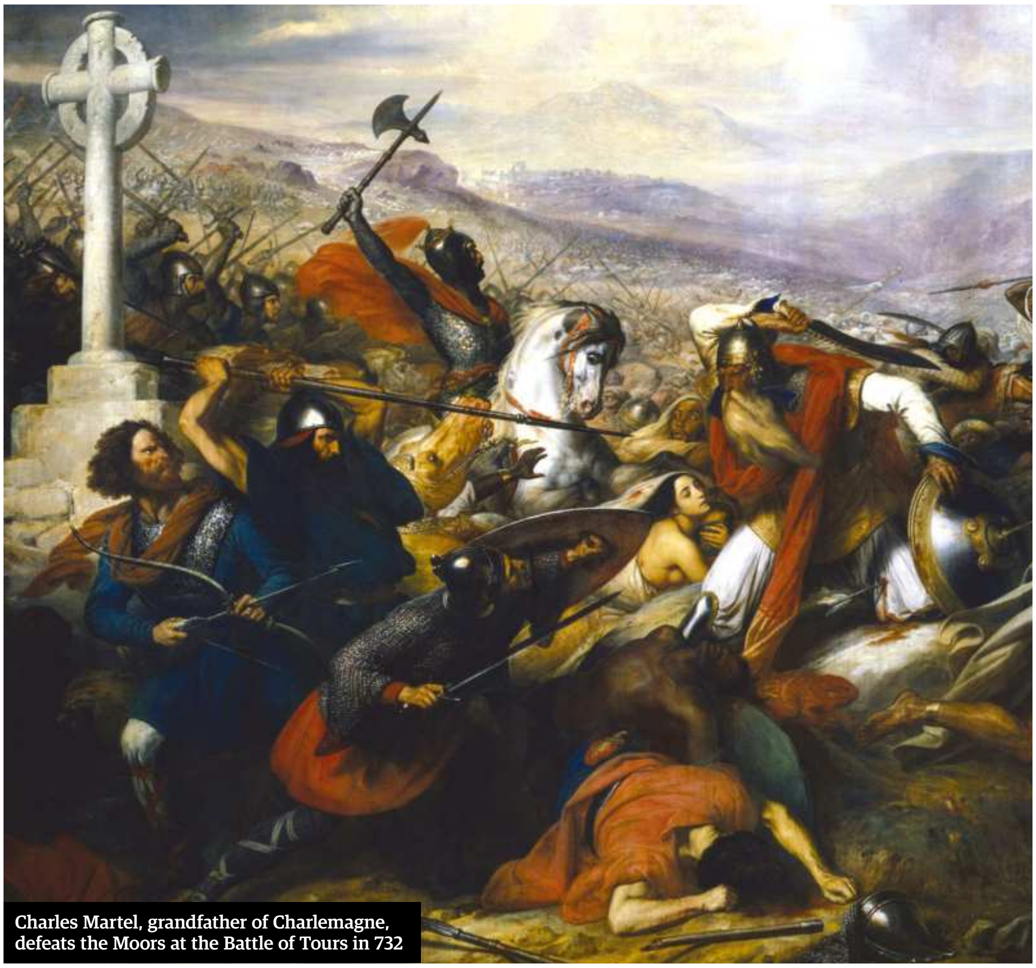
Europe needed a strong leader to pull it back from the precipice, and it got a brace of them in the form of the Carolingian dynasty, a family of self-made kings who stabilised their lands by force, expanded their frontiers with terrifying aggression and ensured the primacy of the Christian Church at the point of the sword. Yet, through this crucible of violence emerged a western Europe reforged to survive another 1,000 years.

By the 6th century, most of what is now France, western Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium was inhabited by the Franks, a Germanic tribe split into several small kingdoms that had rushed into the power vacuum left by the fall of Rome. These petty principalities had been united not by their monarch - rulers in name only, the rois fainéants, the 'do-nothing kings' of the Merovingian dynasty, had been increasingly sidelined by their own ministers - but by the Mayor of the Palace, the executive of the royal administration who was half-prime minister and half-Shogun-esque warlord.

Pepin of Herstal had warred his way to stability between 680 CE and his death in 714 CE, bringing the other Frankish lands to heel and taking Christianity to their furthest and most pagan reaches. His son, Charles Martel, was a stronger hand yet. Though Pepin had nominated his grandson as successor, Charles - born out of wedlock and excluded from the court - was having none of it, and took the not-quite-throne by force. Despite not being Pepin's choice of heir, he more than honoured his father's vision, expanding the centralised control of the Frank lands and extending his rule further into modern Holland, Denmark and Germany with a formidable standing army and revolutionary use of heavy cavalry, the foundation of Europe's knights. He defeated the pagan Saxons in the east and halted the advance of the Moors - the North African and Spanish Muslims of the powerful Umayyad Caliphate - who attempted to follow up their conquest of Spain by pushing across the Pyrenees mountains into France. 'Charles the Hammer' was even offered high office by the Pope, which he declined, but it was an auspicious omen of his grandson's own journey to come.

In later life, Charlemagne came into conflict with his doctors after they advised him to stop eating roasted meat





Charles Martel, grandfather of Charlemagne, defeats the Moors at the Battle of Tours in 732

Succeeding his father Pepin the Short in 768 CE – who had given up the pretence of being anything other than supreme ruler by forcing the last Merovingian king into a monastery and taking the title of 'King of the Franks' – Charlemagne, which means 'Charles the Great', shared the zeal of his predecessors. At war for most of his life, Charlemagne took Charles Martel's fight against the Moors into northern Spain, continued the conquest and conversion of the Saxons and launched new campaigns against the Lombards of northern Italy, the Slavs in Croatia and the Avars in Hungary.

Leading his personal guard, the scara cavalry, into battle with his sword Joyeuse, Charlemagne's exploits have one armoured foot in myth and the other in fact, with separating the two being a difficult task, but his journey from king to the first Roman emperor since the fall of the Roman Empire has little to do with his legend as a warrior king and everything to do with the insecurity of the Church.

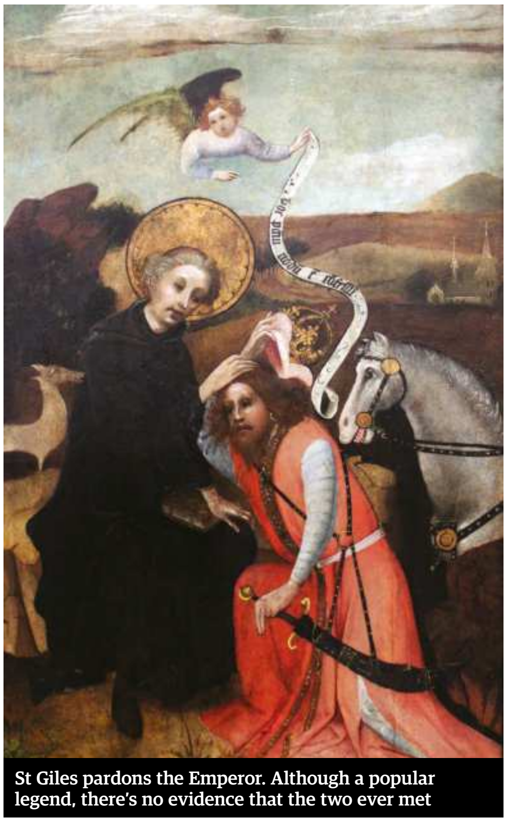
Pope Leo III succeeded Adrian I on the day of the previous pontiff's burial, so fearful was he that the Frankish king to whom his predecessor owed his lands and safety would feel a right to interfere in the election of the new pope. Yet, despite his wariness he was quick to bring Rome's most powerful ally on side; along with the letter that announced his succession, Leo included the keys to St Peter's Basilica and the Pope's banner. The not-so subtle message was that he viewed Charlemagne as the defender of the Holy See, and trusted him with Rome's protection. The Frank was equally magnanimous in return, congratulating the pontiff and sending vast riches, the spoils of his war against the Avars, but not without condition, suggesting that as he happened to be the stalwart defender of Christianity, the pope had a duty to pray for the Frankish armies as they continued their conquest.

Charlemagne would honour his side of this implied bargain, and in return Leo elevated him to an office left vacant since the 5th century.

While Leo engaged in his letter-writing campaign with the monarch to the north-west and used the Avar loot to become a patron of the arts, the family of the late Adrian I launched a conspiracy to remove him from his post and replace him with his nephew Paschal the Primicerius. On 25 April 799 CE, during the procession of The Greater Litanies through the Eternal City, Leo was attacked by armed thugs who stabbed him in the eyes and attempted to tear out his tongue at the root. After dragging him to the church of San Silvestro in Capite and trying to gouge out his eyes again, the bloodied pope was left unconscious as a prisoner at the monastery of St Erasmus. Accused of perjury and fornication by his rivals, the wounded – but amazingly not blinded or voiceless – Leo fled Rome to Spoleto, 126 kilometres (78 miles) north of the city, where under the protection of the Duke of Spoleto he was able to make his way to Charlemagne at Paderborn in Saxony.

That such a loyal servant of the Frankish king could be found so close to Rome, deep within Italy's central Umbria region, neatly underlines the unbalanced relationship of power between the Franks and the Roman Catholic Church that had initially caused Leo such anxiety. Though the territory had been given to Rome in 776 after the defeat of the Lombards, the king retained the power to choose the Duke, making papal control as meaningless as that of the last Merovingian kings under Charlemagne's ancestors.

Clearly, the threat of political interference from Charlemagne had been trumped by that of actual bodily harm, and Leo begged for the monarch's aid. He had no authority to do so – neither he nor the conspirators in Rome were subjects of the Franks, and no law yet existed that would make bishops subordinate to secular authority.



St Giles pardons the Emperor. Although a popular legend, there's no evidence that the two ever met

> "Charlemagne's journey from king to emperor has everything to do with the insecurity of the Church"

With conflict left in Saxony to pursue, Charlemagne let the matter stew for a year and kept the recovering pontiff as his guest. Finally heading to Rome in November 800 CE with a sizeable (and no doubt fairly threatening) entourage, Charlemagne summoned a council of the city's religious authorities and patiently listened to the accusations put to Leo, before allowing the deposed pontiff to make an impassioned plea of innocence.

Unsurprisingly, Charlemange took Leo's side, and ordered the conspirators' executions, but Leo requested that they instead be exiled, with the unpopular pope perhaps seeing an opportunity to impress with capacity for forgiveness.

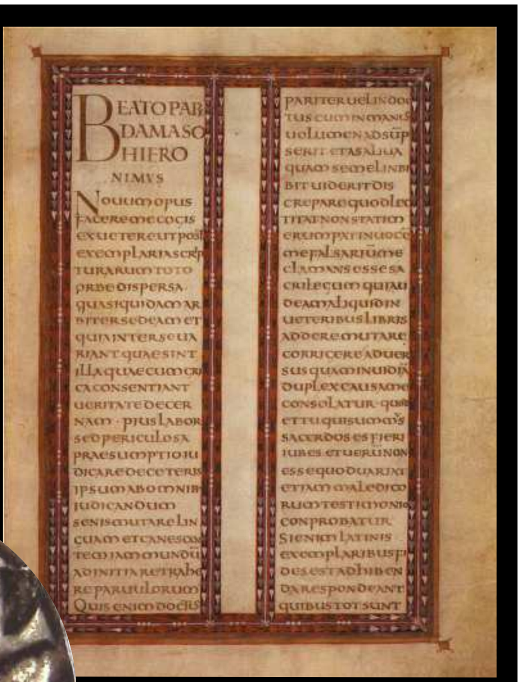
Crowned 'Emperor of the Romans' on Christmas Day that same year by the grateful pope, the official report insists that Charlemagne was ambushed like some sort of early-Medieval surprise party. The king's biographer, the monk Einhard, claimed that his liege had such "aversion [to being crowned Emperor] that he declared he would not have set foot in the church… if he could have foreseen the designs of the pope."

It's entirely possible that Charlemagne and Leo came to some agreement during their year together. After all, the idea of grinning priests hiding a bejewelled imperial crown as if it were a birthday cake is too ludicrous to contemplate. Documents from his reign reveal that Charlemagne preferred using the title 'Charles, the most serene Augustus crowned by God, the great, peaceful Emperor ruling the Roman Empire' rather than the simpler and more often used 'Emperor of the Romans'. These aren't entirely the actions of someone with an aversion to the role, and the king's apparent humility may have been as expertly stage-managed as Leo's mercy.

Nonetheless, with his rule over the Frankish lands uncontested and his empire secured through sheer military prowess, Charlemagne no more needed to declare himself Roman emperor than the fearsome Charles Martel needed to be king. The vulnerable pope, however, required an emperor in order to protect himself and the vast empire with the Church at its heart. Only Rome had nostalgia for its lost empire; the Franks held their 4th century resistance to Roman rule, and their role in dismembering the Roman Empire, as a point of fierce pride.

Birth of the modern Europe

Three big ways in which Charlemagne changed the continent



01 Man of letters

Frustrated by his own difficulty in mastering the written word, Charlemagne rolled out a system of reforms to the very shape of writing, insisting on a double space to separate words, an indent at the start of a paragraph and punctuation marks to indicate where the reader should pause or stop. Question marks and lower case letters also appeared.

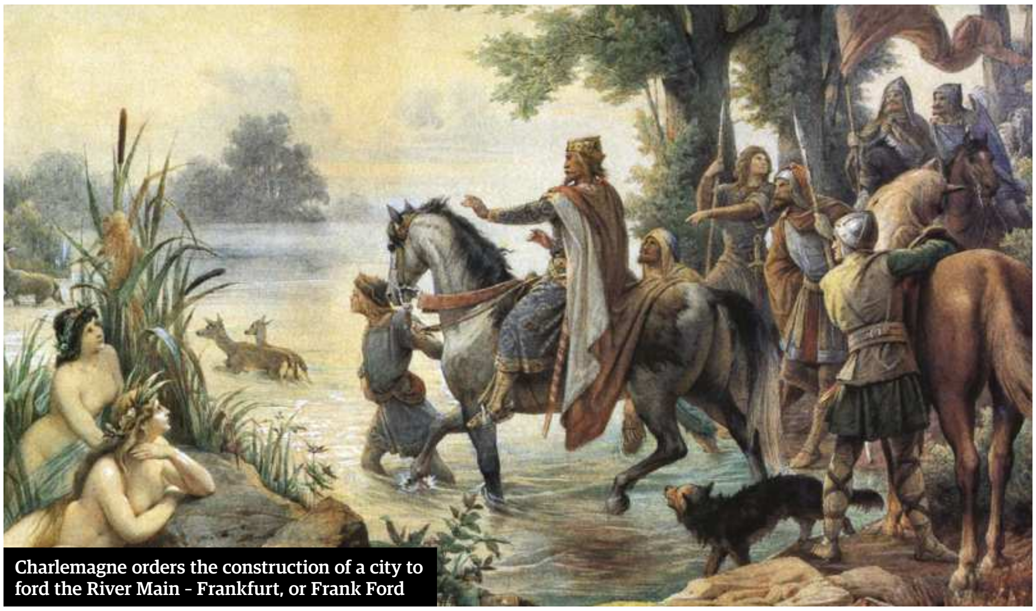
02 Silver age

Due to a shortage of gold, Charlemagne and the Anglo-Saxon King Offa standardised their currencies based on a pound of silver – in Latin, libra – which was broken down into 20 sous, each of 12 deniers. This is the origin of many global currencies past and present, from the British pound to the Italian lira.

03 Out of the dark

Charlemagne's interest in the arts led to the Carolingian Renaissance, a flowering of art, literature, poetry and learning. The Dark Ages traditionally cover the 6th to 13th centuries, but for the Franks it was over before it began, and 90 per cent of surviving Roman manuscripts do so because monks copied them.

> "The way Charlemagne signed his name changed nothing of the way he conducted his affairs"



Charlemagne orders the construction of a city to ford the River Main – Frankfurt, or Frank Ford

Ultimately though, the way Charlemagne signed his name changed nothing of the way he conducted his affairs, and the impact of his ascension – reluctant or willing – to Europe's highest office would take another 150 years to make itself fully known.

The first Holy Roman Emperor, Otto I, took the title in 962 CE and reinvented himself in the Frankish king's image, creating a powerful multi-ethnic state and a crown that would endure for over 1,000 years.

Through the Holy Roman Empire, Charlemagne's rule defined not just the primacy of France as one of Europe's imperial, religious and cultural superpowers, but of numerous Austrian, German and Italian states too.

A career that began for Charlemagne as king of the Franks ended not just as emperor, but also as the father of the Europe that we can still recognise today.

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Saladin's battle for Jerusalem

Battle-hardened after two decades of warfare, the Kurdish-born Ayyubid sultan led a mighty army to total victory against the Franks in 1187

On the south knoll of the Horns of Hattin, the Crusader king reformed his surviving knights for a final charge. The sounds of defeat filled the air. Arrows that blackened the sky rained down from Muslim archers, the wails of wounded and dying pierced the air, and Christian soldiers tried desperately to keep the Muslims at bay.

The Crusaders swept down from the high ground. Their objective was Saladin's yellow banner, protected by hundreds of heavily armed soldiers. The Latin knights crashed into the tightly packed Muslim ranks, which formed a protective barrier around the Ayyubid sultan. Lances shattered on impact, and the knights fought on with swords and axes. They swung and slashed as they fought their way towards the sultan's position. If his banner fell, they might still win the day. It was 4 July 1187. The final phase of the Battle of Hattin was under way.

Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub, known to the Franks as Saladin, was 49 years old by the time of the titanic clash in northern Palestine. His rise to power had begun in 1164 when Nur ad-Din, the Zengid Turkish ruler of Syria, sent the young officer on a military expedition with his uncle, Kurdish warlord Shirkuh, to Fatimid Egypt. Shirkuh's objective was to prevent the weak Shiite caliphate in Cairo from falling to the Franks. Over the course of the next five years, Shirkuh and Saladin conducted three separate expeditions to Egypt. During the last in January 1169, Shirkuh became the Fatimid caliph al-Adid's vizier, or chief minister.

Opportunities always seemed to present themselves to Saladin, but often a sixth sense was required to know how to navigate treacherous palace politics where anyone might be assassinated by the henchmen of an even more clever foe. When Shirkuh died two months after becoming vizier, Saladin succeeded his uncle in the key post. This gave him a power base, and he moved rapidly to bring the rest of his family to Egypt and hand out fiefs to them.

Saladin continued climbing the rungs of the Islamic leadership ladder. When al-Adid passed away in late summer 1171, Saladin, with ad-Din's blessing, became caliph of Egypt. Ad-Din approved of Saladin's ascension to the high post because it would enable Saladin to replace Egypt's Fatimid Shiite government with a Sunni administration. Perhaps the greatest opportunity of Saladin's life unfolded three years later when ad-Din died. Although ad-Din's 11-year-old son succeeded him, Saladin successfully extended his power into Syria.

But eradicating rival Zengid princes in Syria proved a protracted matter for Saladin. Over the course of the next two decades, he walked a tightrope balancing offensives against the Latin Crusader States with those against rival Zengid princes. Although Saladin secured Damascus

The Battle of Cresson was a decisive victory for Saladin against the Knights Templar

5 Key Battles

Saladin had a chequered record fighting the Crusaders before his great victory at Hattin. His strategy varied between sieges, raids, and pitched battles

25 November 1177

Battle of Montgisard

During his first major raid into the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the autumn of 1171, Saladin underestimates the ability of King Baldwin IV to contest his advance. The Franks ambush the Ayyubids, inflicting a stinging defeat on them. Saladin himself is nearly captured and is said to have raced for the safety of Egypt on the back of a camel.

30 August 1179

Battle of Jacob's Ford

In late summer 1179, Saladin attacks the uncompleted Crusader fortress of Chastellet at Jacob's Ford on the Upper Jordan River. Despite a tenacious defence by the Knights Templar garrison, a swift siege in which professional sappers collapse a section of the wall enables the Muslims to slay the garrison.

29 September – 8 October 1183

Standoff at Ayn Jalut

Intent on provoking a decisive clash with the Franks, Saladin crosses the Jordan River into Galilee. Guy of Lusignan, the regent for terminally ill King Baldwin IV, leads an army to intercept him. Saladin tries to lure the Franks into making a tactical error, but Guy entrenches and Saladin withdraws.

November – December 1183

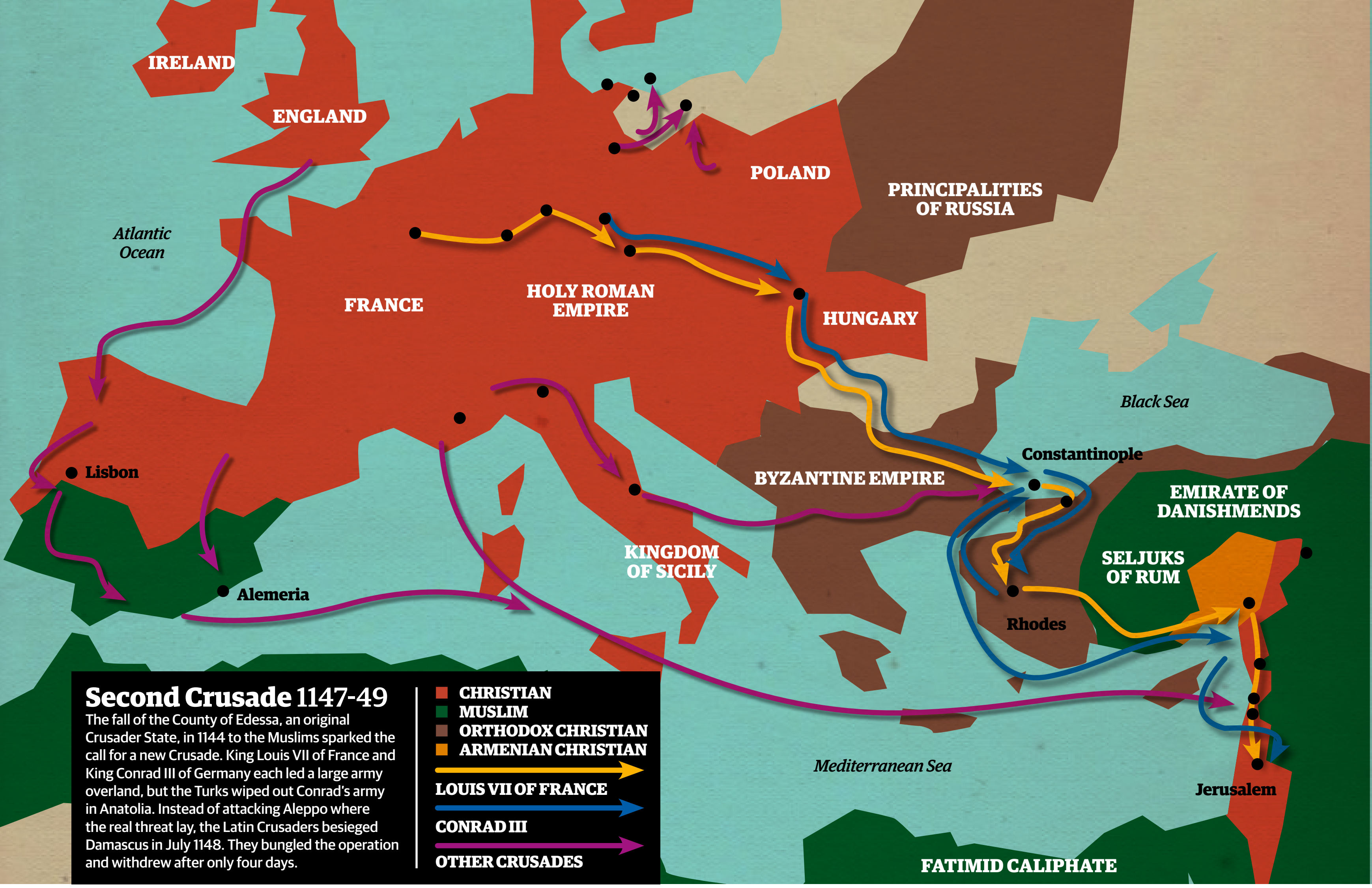
Siege of Kerak

After failing to bring about a decisive battle in Galilee, Saladin leads his army south to besiege Kerak Castle, which still holds a Christian garrison. Although Saladin's army has catapults and towers, they are unable to successfully bridge the castle's dry moat.

1 May 1187

Battle of Cresson

Saladin's son, Al-Afdal ibn Salah ad-Din, leads a large force into Galilee to assess Crusader strength. A passing party of Knights Templar and Hospitaller rides to intercept him. Templar Master Gerard of Ridefort orders an attack against the larger force. Al-Afdal destroys the Crusader force. Ridefort escapes, but Hospitaller Master Roger de Moulins is slain.



Second Crusade 1147-49

The fall of the County of Edessa, an original Crusader State, in 1144 to the Muslims sparked the call for a new Crusade. King Louis VII of France and King Conrad III of Germany each led a large army overland, but the Turks wiped out Conrad's army in Anatolia. Instead of attacking Aleppo where the real threat lay, the Latin Crusaders besieged Damascus in July 1148. They bungled the operation and withdrew after only four days.

🟥 CHRISTIAN
🟩 MUSLIM
🟫 ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
🟧 ARMENIAN CHRISTIAN
→ LOUIS VII OF FRANCE
→ CONRAD III
→ OTHER CRUSADES

without bloodshed in 1174, it would be nearly another decade until he could capture Aleppo in 1183. By then he had extended his control over most of Syria, as well as most of Jazira to the east, forging in the process an impressive Ayyubid Empire, which bore his family surname.

The rulers of the rival Seljuk and Ayyubid empires were in constant competition, and both reported to the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad. Throughout the long years campaigning against the rival Zengid Dynasty, Saladin had to justify to the Abbasid caliph why he saw it necessary to take up the sword against fellow Muslims instead of Christian infidels. Saladin told the caliph that he would not be strong enough to defeat the Franks until he had amassed greater power.

> Though he was largely forgotten after his death, Saladin later gained a reputation as a chivalrous knight in the 19th century

Saladin invaded the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, the largest of three Crusader States, in the autumn of 1183. Guy of Lusignan, regent of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, was determined to fight a defensive battle, and Saladin was forced to withdraw. In winter 1186-87, an incident occurred that gave Saladin good cause to re-invade the Latin kingdom. Lord Raynald of Châtillon, a sworn enemy of Saladin, pillaged a Muslim caravan travelling from Cairo to Damascus through his realm.

Saladin had entered into a two-year truce with Raynald in 1186 in which the Frankish baron had agreed to allow caravans to pass unmolested from Egypt to Syria. But Raynald had confiscated the riches and imprisoned the travellers. Saladin requested multiple times that Raynald release the prisoners and their possessions. "The Count persistently refused to comply," wrote contemporary Arab historian Ibn al-Athir. "Saladin vowed if he ever laid hands on him, he would kill him."

In spring 1187, Saladin began assembling a large army in southern Syria. His generals, each of whom would command the equivalent of a modern corps in the upcoming campaign, were his nephew Al-Muzaffar Taqi al-Din, who would lead the right wing, and Kurdish-born Muzaffar ad-Din Gokbori, who would lead the left wing. Saladin would command the centre.

Saladin had approximately 30,000 men, half of which were veteran cavalry. The ground where the battle would unfold consisted of rolling hills with expansive plateaus blanketed with grass and bristling with rocky outcroppings. Water could be found in varying amounts at different springs. Saladin intended to block the Crusaders from reaching the Sea of Galilee, where they would have abundant water. He also intended to isolate them, if possible, away from a desert spring.

Saladin led his army across the Jordan River during the last week in June. The Ayyubids encamped at Kafr Sabt, which was ten kilometres south west of Tiberias. The Crusader army mustered at Sephorie, 24 kilometres from Tiberias. King Guy of Jerusalem commanded 20,000 men, of which 15,000 were infantry, 3,800 were auxiliary cavalry, and 1,200 were mounted knights. The horses were not armoured, and therefore vulnerable to arrows. Prince Raymond III of Tripoli commanded the vanguard, Guy the mainguard, and Count Balian of Ibelin led the rearguard, which included the elite Hospitallers and Templars.

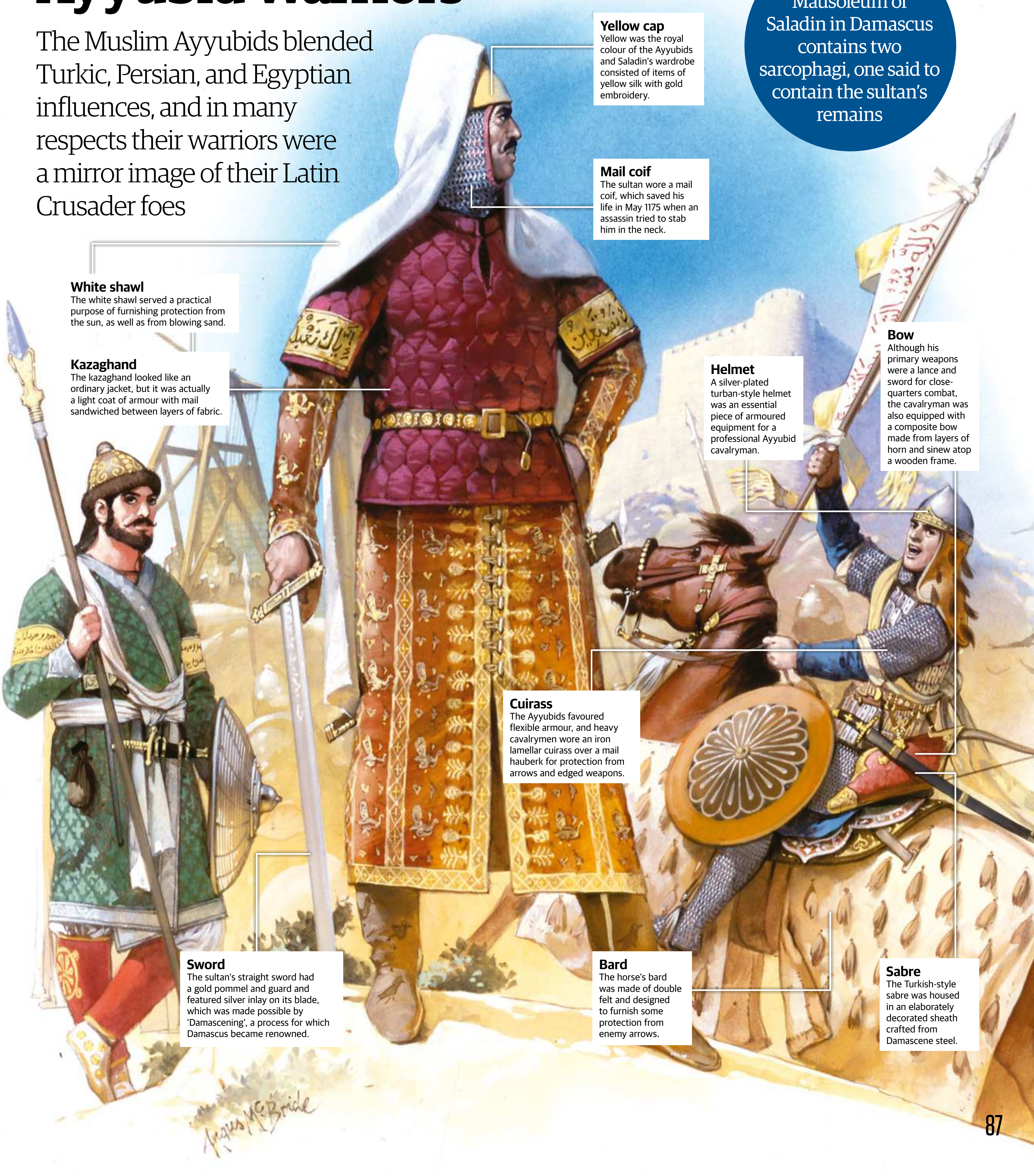
To lure the Crusaders into battle, Saladin personally led a detachment on 2 June to besiege Tiberias. Guy took the bait without gathering reconnaissance on the size or location of the enemy forces. The distance to Tiberius would be too much to cover in one day should they run into serious opposition, but Guy had no idea where they would camp after the first day's march.

The Crusaders left camp at dawn and set off for the spring of Turan, where limited water was available. On the march, foot soldiers in each of the three corps formed a protective square around the mounted knights and sergeants. The Crusaders reached Turan at midday and some troops and horses received water. They had only covered ten kilometres. Guy decided to press on for the village of Hattin, which was situated about eight kilometres to the north-east, where ample water was stored.

Ayyubid Warriors

The Muslim Ayyubids blended Turkic, Persian, and Egyptian influences, and in many respects their warriors were a mirror image of their Latin Crusader foes

The Mausoleum of Saladin in Damascus contains two sarcophagi, one said to contain the sultan's remains



Yellow cap
Yellow was the royal colour of the Ayyubids and Saladin's wardrobe consisted of items of yellow silk with gold embroidery.

Mail coif
The sultan wore a mail coif, which saved his life in May 1175 when an assassin tried to stab him in the neck.

White shawl
The white shawl served a practical purpose of furnishing protection from the sun, as well as from blowing sand.

Kazaghand
The kazaghand looked like an ordinary jacket, but it was actually a light coat of armour with mail sandwiched between layers of fabric.

Helmet
A silver-plated turban-style helmet was an essential piece of armoured equipment for a professional Ayyubid cavalryman.

Bow
Although his primary weapons were a lance and sword for close-quarters combat, the cavalryman was also equipped with a composite bow made from layers of horn and sinew atop a wooden frame.

Cuirass
The Ayyubids favoured flexible armour, and heavy cavalrymen wore an iron lamellar cuirass over a mail hauberk for protection from arrows and edged weapons.

Sword
The sultan's straight sword had a gold pommel and guard and featured silver inlay on its blade, which was made possible by 'Damascening', a process for which Damascus became renowned.

Bard
The horse's bard was made of double felt and designed to furnish some protection from enemy arrows.

Sabre
The Turkish-style sabre was housed in an elaborately decorated sheath crafted from Damascene steel.

> "Guy led two headlong charges, but Saladin's Mamluk bodyguards drove them back with heavy losses every time"

The Muslims soon appeared in large numbers on both flanks of the Latin army. Saladin's strategy, for the most part, was the same as that practiced by the Mongols and Asian steppe warriors. He would encircle the enemy and weaken it with heavy range from his archers. If the Crusaders charged the archers, they would scatter to avoid contact.

Mounted skirmishers armed with compound bows maintained steady pressure on the Crusader vanguard throughout the first day. The result was that by midday, the Crusader advance slowed to a crawl. Guy sent a messenger to get Raymond's advice. He suggested they camp for the night.

The Crusaders were at a junction called Maskana, which had no water. Nevertheless, Guy took Raymond's advice. He may have hoped the Muslims would attack, in which case the Franks would have an advantage on the defensive. But Saladin had no such intentions. The Christians, most of who were dehydrated, slept on their arms.

"The Muslims for their part had lost their first fear of the enemy and were in high spirits, and spent the night inciting one another to battle," wrote al-Athir. "They could smell victory in the air."

The Crusaders renewed their advance at dawn. Muslim archers shot a steady stream of arrows into their ranks. In addition, the Muslim skirmishers repeatedly attacked Raymond's vanguard.

The Latin infantry, which lacked the knights' esprit de corps, became despondent. The foot soldiers began to break formation, which left the knights unprotected. The infantry wandered toward the north of the two hills that formed the Horns of Hattin. Guy begged them to stay in column, but they could not be rallied. The Crusaders' only hope lay in reaching the village of Hattin. But the village was in Muslim hands, and Saladin's troops had no intention of allowing the Christians to reach it.

With the situation growing increasingly desperate by mid-morning, Raymond assembled his knights for a headlong charge against Taqi al-Din's troops. The charge was successful and Raymond, Balian, and about a dozen knights escaped. Guy was left with his household knights and those from the two military orders.

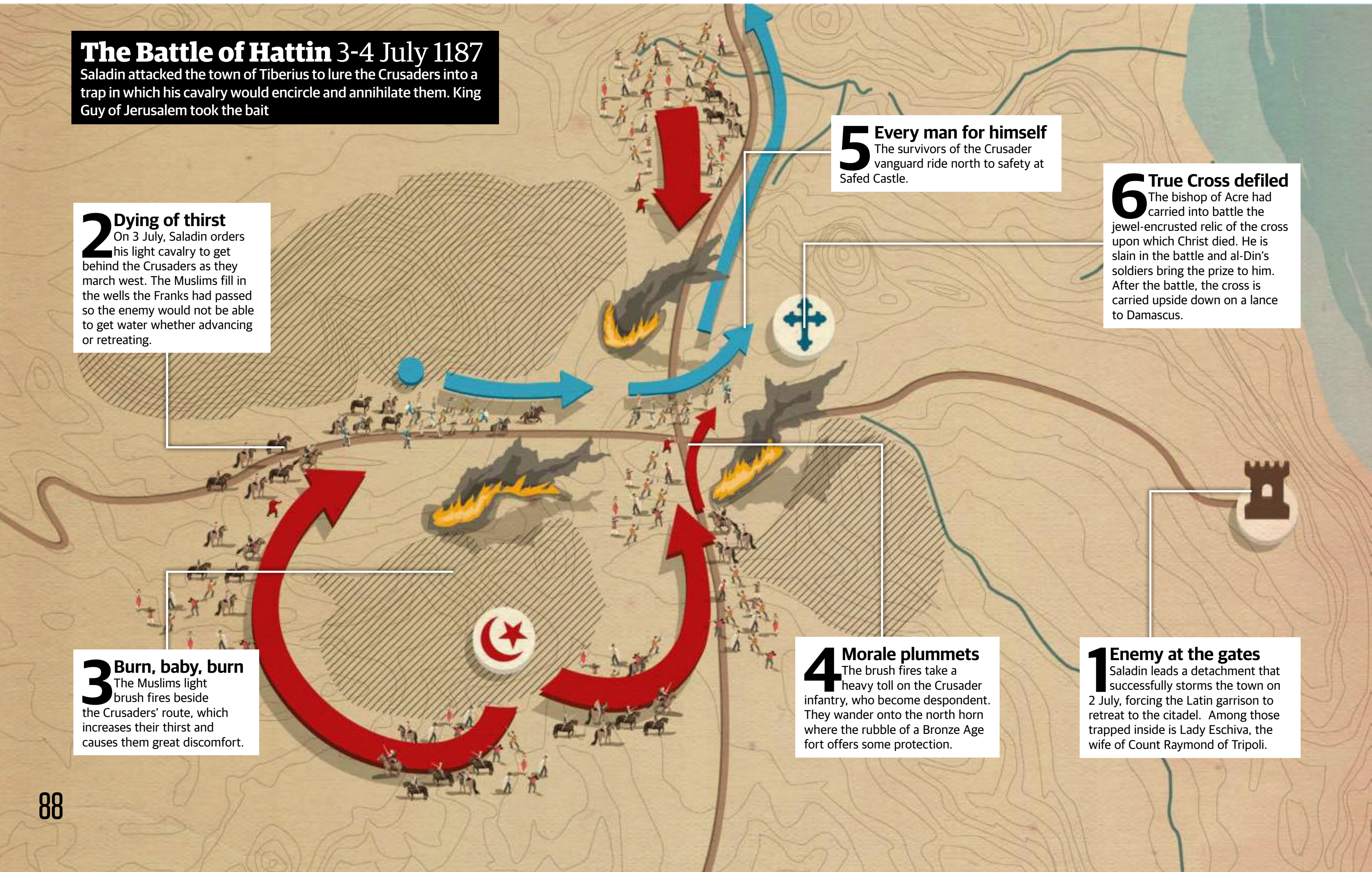
In a last-ditch effort to rally his troops, Guy instructed his squires to put up his red tent on the lower slope of the south horn. By that time, Muslim infantry was attacking the Crusader foot atop the Horns of Hattin. At mid-afternoon, Guy believed that his only hope lay in charging towards Saladin's position. He led two headlong charges, but Saladin's Mamluk bodyguards drove them back with heavy losses each time.

Guy and his knights took up a defensive position on the southern horn with some of the infantry. Saladin ordered an assault against the horns. Heavy cavalry armed with lances overran the Crusader position; in the process, they captured the morale-boosting relic known as the True Cross. With its loss went any last shred of morale, and Guy ordered his men to cast away their weapons and lie flat on the ground, placing themselves at Saladin's mercy.

The Franks were rounded up and paraded before Saladin. Approximately 200 Knights Templar were executed. Saladin agreed to ransom Guy and the other nobles. The rank and file of the Crusader army were led away to be sold into slavery.

Saladin is said to have called Guy and Raynald of Chatillon into his tent. He gave a goblet filled with iced water to Guy, but when Guy sought to pass it to Raynald, Saladin stopped him. Saladin then made good on his vow to kill Raynald and cut him down with his sword.

The Ayyubid sultan rightly assumed that the barons who escaped would appeal to the Latin West for reinforcements, and he sent his troops



The Battle of Hattin 3-4 July 1187

Saladin attacked the town of Tiberius to lure the Crusaders into a trap in which his cavalry would encircle and annihilate them. King Guy of Jerusalem took the bait

1 Enemy at the gates
Saladin leads a detachment that successfully storms the town on 2 July, forcing the Latin garrison to retreat to the citadel. Among those trapped inside is Lady Eschiva, the wife of Count Raymond of Tripoli.

2 Dying of thirst
On 3 July, Saladin orders his light cavalry to get behind the Crusaders as they march west. The Muslims fill in the wells the Franks had passed so the enemy would not be able to get water whether advancing or retreating.

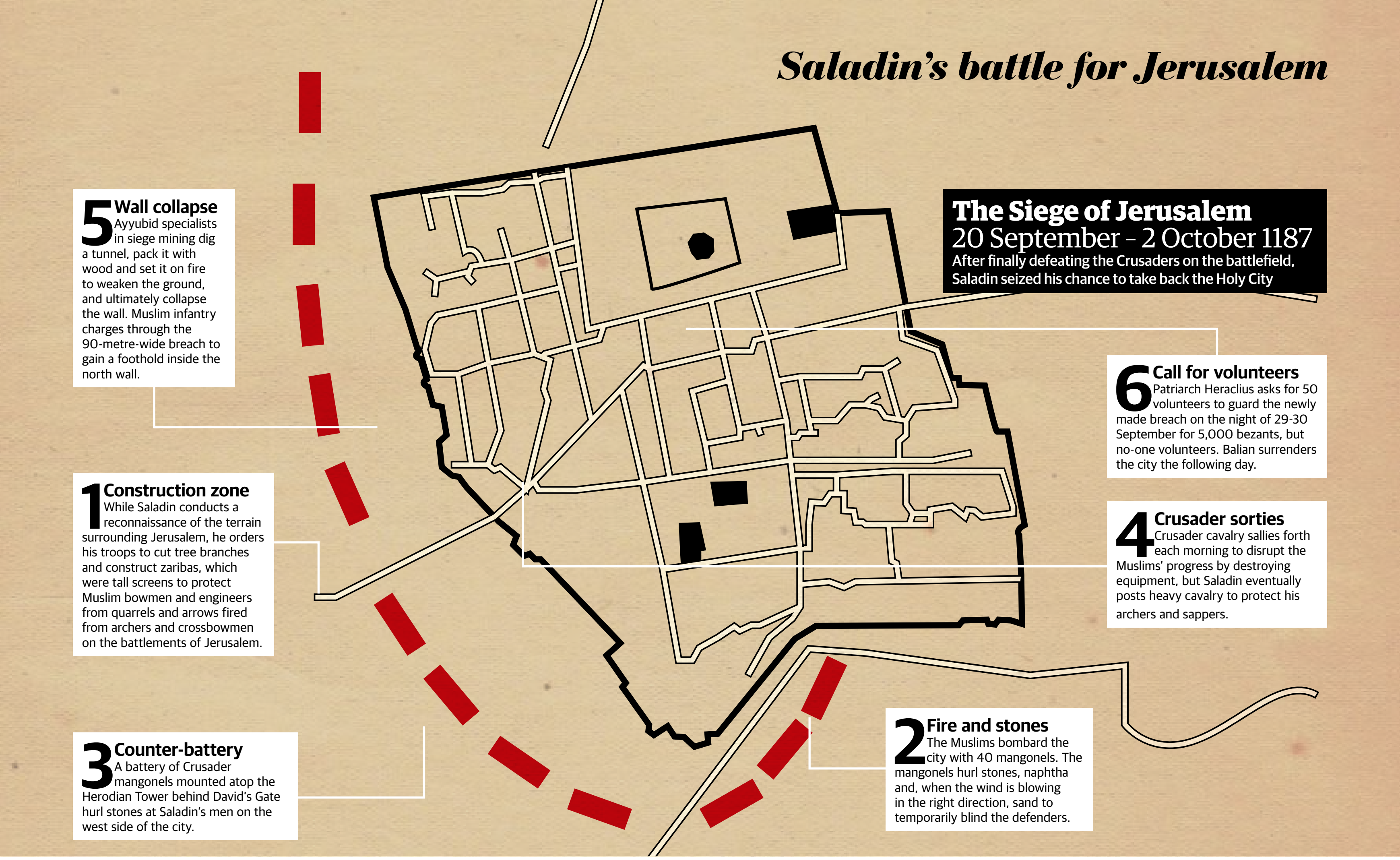
3 Burn, baby, burn
The Muslims light brush fires beside the Crusaders' route, which increases their thirst and causes them great discomfort.

4 Morale plummets
The brush fires take a heavy toll on the Crusader infantry, who become despondent. They wander onto the north horn where the rubble of a Bronze Age fort offers some protection.

5 Every man for himself
The survivors of the Crusader vanguard ride north to safety at Safed Castle.

6 True Cross defiled
The bishop of Acre had carried into battle the jewel-encrusted relic of the cross upon which Christ died. He is slain in the battle and al-Din's soldiers bring the prize to him. After the battle, the cross is carried upside down on a lance to Damascus.

Saladin's battle for Jerusalem



The Siege of Jerusalem

20 September – 2 October 1187

After finally defeating the Crusaders on the battlefield, Saladin seized his chance to take back the Holy City

1 Construction zone While Saladin conducts a reconnaissance of the terrain surrounding Jerusalem, he orders his troops to cut tree branches and construct zaribas, which were tall screens to protect Muslim bowmen and engineers from quarrels and arrows fired from archers and crossbowmen on the battlements of Jerusalem.

2 Fire and stones The Muslims bombard the city with 40 mangonels. The mangonels hurl stones, naphtha and, when the wind is blowing in the right direction, sand to temporarily blind the defenders.

3 Counter-battery A battery of Crusader mangonels mounted atop the Herodian Tower behind David's Gate hurl stones at Saladin's men on the west side of the city.

4 Crusader sorties Crusader cavalry sallies forth each morning to disrupt the Muslims' progress by destroying equipment, but Saladin eventually posts heavy cavalry to protect his archers and sappers.

5 Wall collapse Ayyubid specialists in siege mining dig a tunnel, pack it with wood and set it on fire to weaken the ground, and ultimately collapse the wall. Muslim infantry charges through the 90-metre-wide breach to gain a foothold inside the north wall.

6 Call for volunteers Patriarch Heraclius asks for 50 volunteers to guard the newly made breach on the night of 29-30 September for 5,000 bezants, but no-one volunteers. Balian surrenders the city the following day.

to capture as many key towns and strongholds in the Kingdom of Jerusalem as possible before reinforcements arrived. After capturing Acre on 8 July, Saladin turned his attention to Tyre. Fortunately for the Christians, a new leader had arrived earlier that month. Marquis Conrad of Montferrat, who sought to escape problems at home by taking up the cross, organised a strong defence. Saladin, who was impatient to capture Jerusalem, turned south.

Saladin's 20,000 troops arrived before the walls of Jerusalem more than two months later on 20 September. Balian of Ibelin commanded approximately 5,000 men. The population had swelled to 60,000 as a result of an influx of refugees. Unlike the setback at Tyre, the sultan had no intention of abandoning the siege. The Ayyubid leader "took an oath not to depart until he had honoured his word and raised his standard on her highest point, and had visited with his own feet the place where the Prophet [Muhammed] had set foot," wrote Imad ad-Din, Saladin's field secretary.

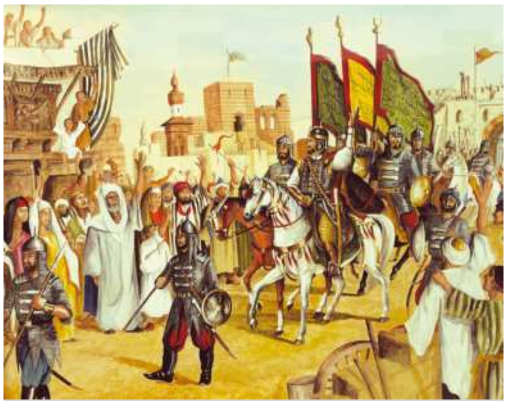
Saladin's men deployed on the north and west side opposite St Stephen's and David's gates, respectively. Over the course of five days, the Ayyubids assaulted the gates and attempted to scale the walls. After such time, the Muslims could not make any headway in their attempts to storm the west wall. For that reason, Saladin ordered them to redeploy in an arc that wrapped around the north-east corner of the city. He also issued orders for professional sappers from Aleppo to mine the walls. Several teams worked tirelessly for the next four days to weaken the walls. On 29 September, they collapsed a section of the outer wall on the north side near Herod's Gate.

Saladin spared the city. Instead of slaughtering innocents, he decided to allow them to ransom themselves. Once the ransom was paid, they would have 40 days to leave. The idea came from Saladin's advisers, according to al-Athir. "Let us consider them as already being our prisoners, and let them ransom themselves on terms agreed between us," Saladin's advisers told him.

Saladin thus set a ransom of ten gold pieces for each man, five for each woman and one for each child. About two-thirds of the Christians could pay their own ransom, but the rest were too poor. Balian gave Saladin 30,000 gold pieces from the city's coffers to cover 7,000 of the poor, but the other 13,000 were led away to be sold into slavery.

The Muslims took control of Jerusalem on 2 October. Ayyubid banners were hoisted throughout the city. A week later, Saladin attended Friday prayers in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque. Afterwards, the sultan ordered the mosque, which had been desecrated, be restored to its original glory with marble, gold tiling and mosaics.

Shortly afterwards, King Richard I of England and King Philip II of France both took the cross, determined to recapture Jerusalem. They participated in the bloody Third Crusade against Saladin from 1189 to 1192. Although the Crusaders retook Acre and other strongholds, they were unable to recapture the Holy City. Jerusalem remained in Muslim hands as a result of Saladin's ability to unify and mobilise previously divided Muslim groups against the Crusaders.



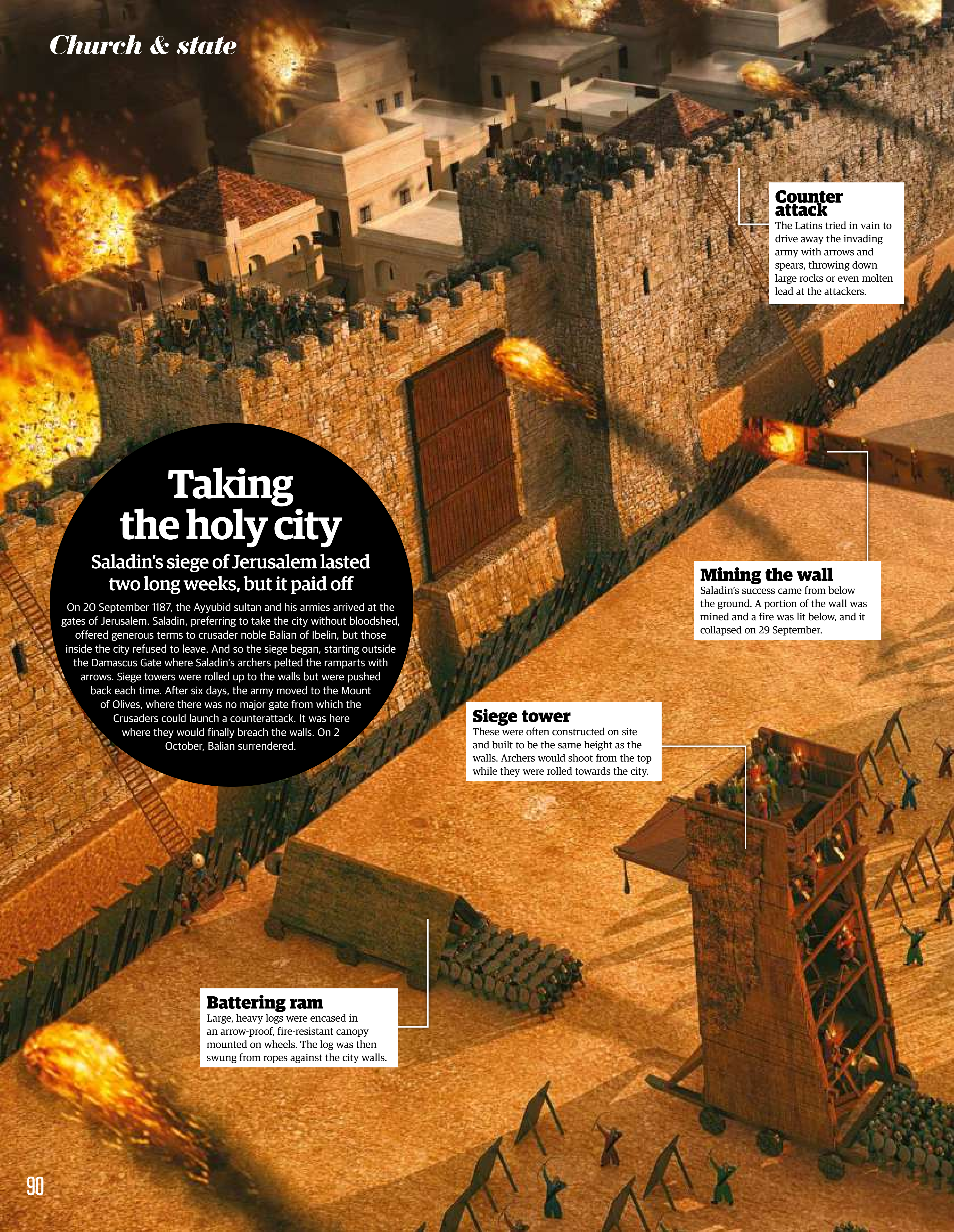
In the aftermath of the siege, Saladin released many of the captured slaves as a gesture of clemency

Jerusalem's Damascus Gate was known as St Stephen's gate during the Crusaders' occupation

Taking the holy city

Saladin's siege of Jerusalem lasted two long weeks, but it paid off

On 20 September 1187, the Ayyubid sultan and his armies arrived at the gates of Jerusalem. Saladin, preferring to take the city without bloodshed, offered generous terms to crusader noble Balian of Ibelin, but those inside the city refused to leave. And so the siege began, starting outside the Damascus Gate where Saladin's archers pelted the ramparts with arrows. Siege towers were rolled up to the walls but were pushed back each time. After six days, the army moved to the Mount of Olives, where there was no major gate from which the Crusaders could launch a counterattack. It was here where they would finally breach the walls. On 2 October, Balian surrendered.



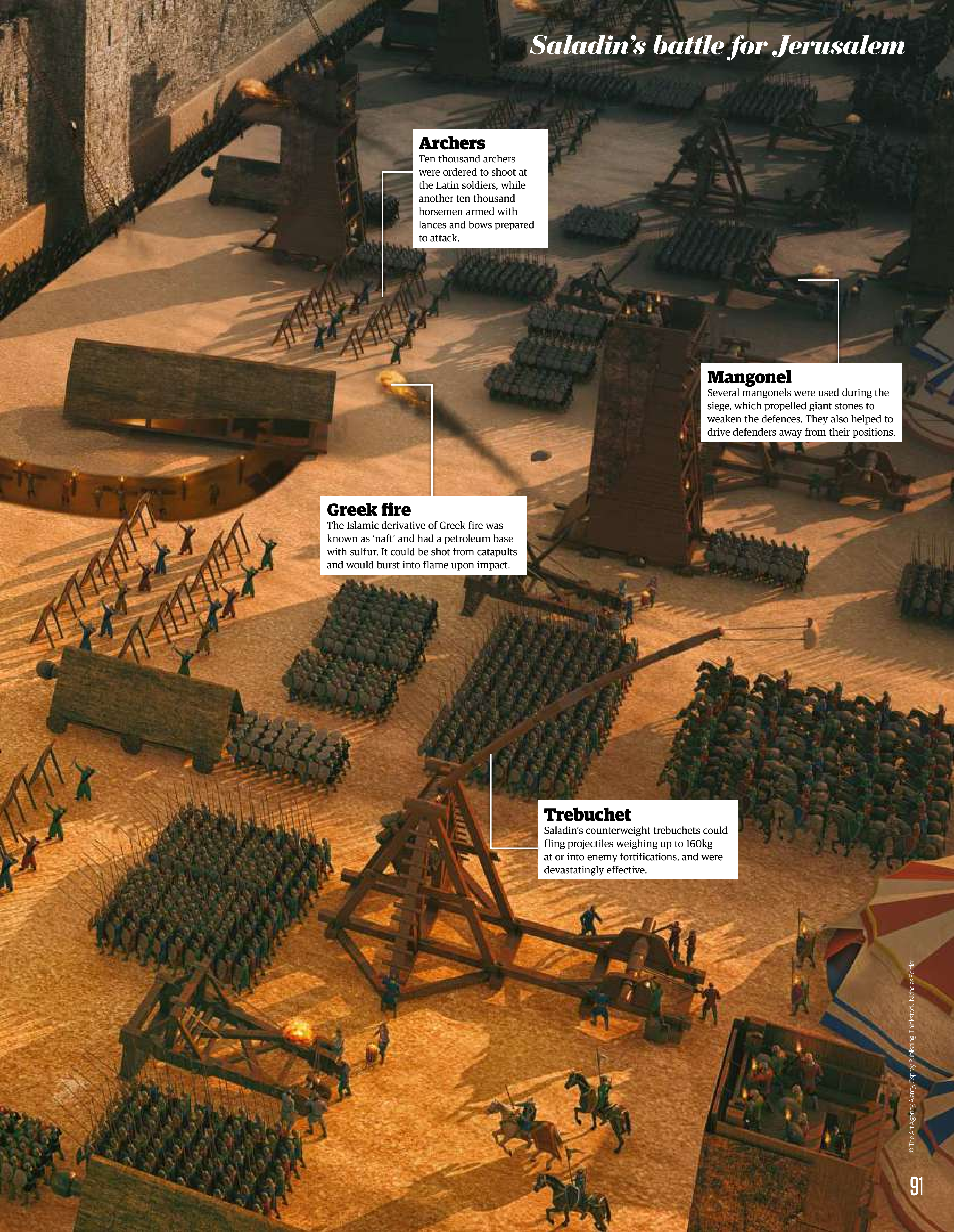
Counter attack
The Latins tried in vain to drive away the invading army with arrows and spears, throwing down large rocks or even molten lead at the attackers.

Mining the wall
Saladin's success came from below the ground. A portion of the wall was mined and a fire was lit below, and it collapsed on 29 September.

Siege tower
These were often constructed on site and built to be the same height as the walls. Archers would shoot from the top while they were rolled towards the city.

Battering ram
Large, heavy logs were encased in an arrow-proof, fire-resistant canopy mounted on wheels. The log was then swung from ropes against the city walls.

Saladin's battle for Jerusalem



Archers
Ten thousand archers were ordered to shoot at the Latin soldiers, while another ten thousand horsemen armed with lances and bows prepared to attack.

Mangonel
Several mangonels were used during the siege, which propelled giant stones to weaken the defences. They also helped to drive defenders away from their positions.

Greek fire
The Islamic derivative of Greek fire was known as 'naft' and had a petroleum base with sulfur. It could be shot from catapults and would burst into flame upon impact.

Trebuchet
Saladin's counterweight trebuchets could fling projectiles weighing up to 160kg at or into enemy fortifications, and were devastatingly effective.

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Richard the Lionheart's bloody Crusade

Born to royalty but educated in the charnel gutter of war, King Richard brought the religious fanaticism of the Christian West to the Muslim East in a quest to claim the fabled Holy Land

For almost a year the mighty city of Acre held firm. Despite wave after wave of Christian knights pouring all their religious fervour and military might against its ancient walls, it had held back the tide and somehow halted the progress of the foreign hordes that now threatened to overrun the entire Near East.

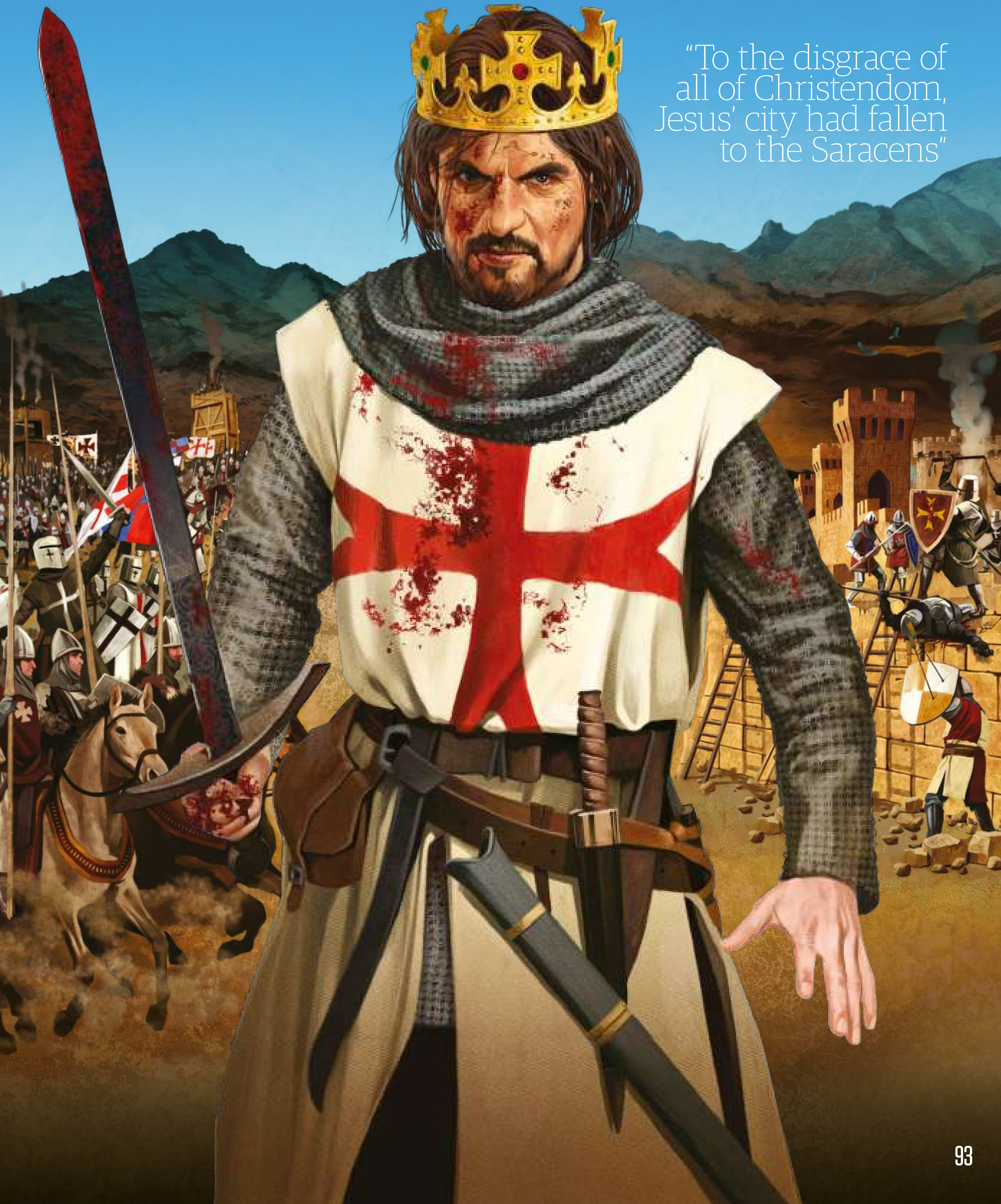
More and more men came, though - the attacks were relentless. When the first army had been held at bay, the city's inhabitants thought they were safe, that the invasion was defeated. However, then yet another army landed and the city's main artery, its port, which provided passage in and out of its walls, was taken. The city's defences were tested once more, with an even more ferocious attack battering at the doors and calling for blood. Luckily for those within, once more the city held off the mass of warriors, its infidel leaders repelled.

Then, with the new year's sailing season, another invader arrived by sea with a fresh bloodthirsty army. He was followed in May by yet another, with tens of thousands of soldiers joining the infidels' camp outside the walls, swelling their numbers to terrifying proportions. They attacked again and the losses on both sides were massive. The lack of food and supplies in the city, and the spread of disease within the invaders' camp, drove both sets of warriors to extremes, stoking the fires of faith that lay within their hearts to pursue bolder and bolder acts of violence.

Today is the eighth day of June 1191 and, as Acre slowly suffocates in the oppressive heat of the Levant's summer months, yet another fleet is landing in the city's once-prosperous port, this time with one of the biggest forces the city has ever seen. If the ruler of Acre, the noble and great Saladin, doesn't send meaningful reinforcements soon, then the city will fall and the gates to the Holy Land will be brutally wrenched open to the Christian hordes.

They call this one, this man-mountain stepping off his ship onto the dusty dry shore, the Lionheart, and he is here to kill them all in the name of his god and glory. The passage had been long and painful, featuring storms, shipwrecks and a mad despot who threatened to derail the Third Crusade before it had even begun. No matter; King Richard the Lionheart and his army have survived the trip across the Mediterranean Sea and reached the Holy Land. After months of pursuit and planning, they are primed to fulfil their mission, Richard's mission, God's mission, to take the Holy Land by storm and cut a direct path to the holiest of all cities, Jerusalem itself.

To the disgrace of all of Christendom, Jesus' city had fallen four years previous to the Saracen Ayyubid hordes, which was now not only ruled by Christianity's arch-nemesis Saladin, but also defiled by their very presence within its hallowed walls. The city, which had been safely held in Christian hands for almost 100 years since the First Crusade



> "To the disgrace of all of Christendom, Jesus' city had fallen to the Saracens"

Crusaders

NUMBER OF TROOPS:

20,000

LEADER

RICHARD THE LIONHEART

Excellent on the battlefield, Richard the Lionheart was a brutal killer and a gifted tactical thinker, leading an army of religious fanatics with ruthless efficiency.

Strength Amazing warrior and powerful military leader.

Weakness Politically and economically reckless as king.

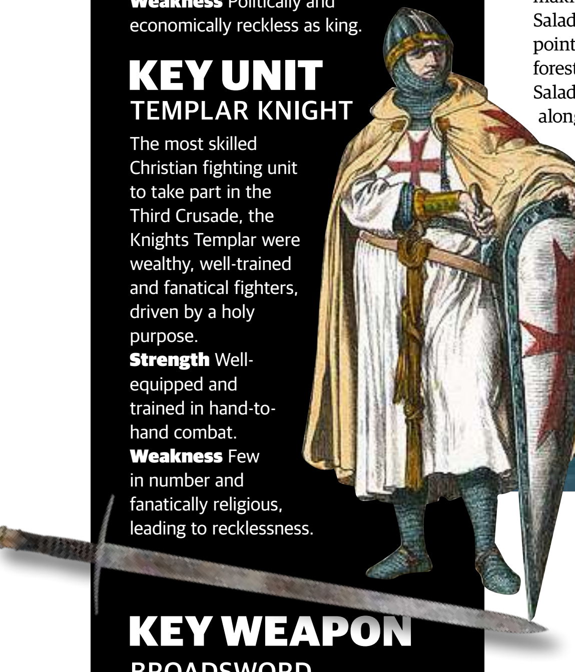
KEY UNIT

TEMPLAR KNIGHT

The most skilled Christian fighting unit to take part in the Third Crusade, the Knights Templar were wealthy, well-trained and fanatical fighters, driven by a holy purpose.

Strength Well-equipped and trained in hand-to-hand combat.

Weakness Few in number and fanatically religious, leading to recklessness.



KEY WEAPON

BROADSWORD

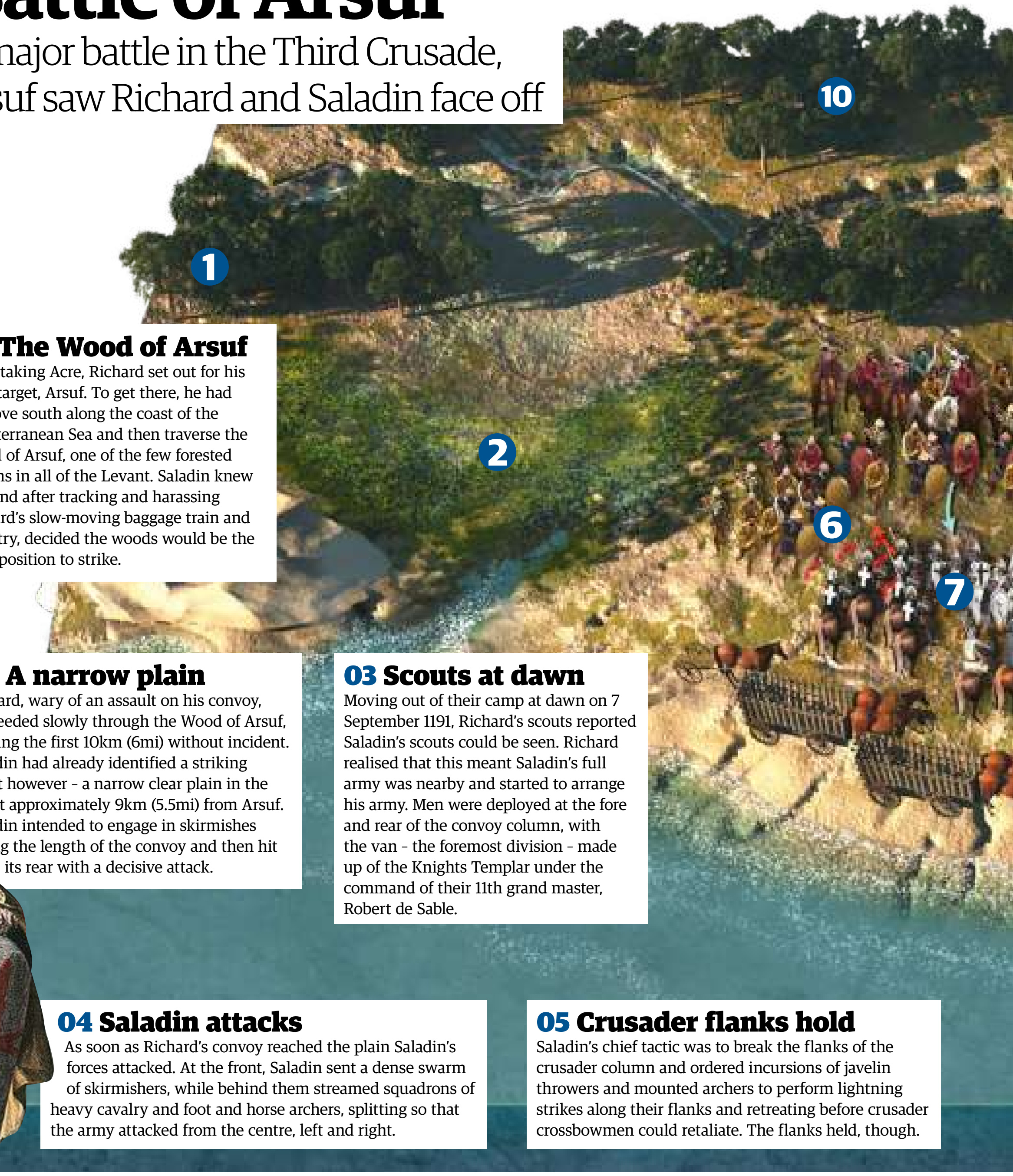
The most popular hand-to-hand weapon of all Christian knight orders, including the Knights Templar and Knights Hospitaller, the broadsword was a well-balanced and deadly weapon capable of stabbing and cleaving.

Strength Great all-round weapon that also allowed shield use.

Weakness Could be out-ranged with two-handed swords and spears.

Battle of Arsuf

A major battle in the Third Crusade, Arsuf saw Richard and Saladin face off



01 The Wood of Arsuf

After taking Acre, Richard set out for his next target, Arsuf. To get there, he had to move south along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and then traverse the Wood of Arsuf, one of the few forested regions in all of the Levant. Saladin knew this and after tracking and harassing Richard's slow-moving baggage train and infantry, decided the woods would be the ideal position to strike.

02 A narrow plain

Richard, wary of an assault on his convoy, proceeded slowly through the Wood of Arsuf, making the first 10km (6mi) without incident. Saladin had already identified a striking point however – a narrow clear plain in the forest approximately 9km (5.5mi) from Arsuf. Saladin intended to engage in skirmishes along the length of the convoy and then hit its rear with a decisive attack.

03 Scouts at dawn

Moving out of their camp at dawn on 7 September 1191, Richard's scouts reported Saladin's scouts could be seen. Richard realised that this meant Saladin's full army was nearby and started to arrange his army. Men were deployed at the fore and rear of the convoy column, with the van – the foremost division – made up of the Knights Templar under the command of their 11th grand master, Robert de Sable.

04 Saladin attacks

As soon as Richard's convoy reached the plain Saladin's forces attacked. At the front, Saladin sent a dense swarm of skirmishers, while behind them streamed squadrons of heavy cavalry and foot and horse archers, splitting so that the army attacked from the centre, left and right.

05 Crusader flanks hold

Saladin's chief tactic was to break the flanks of the crusader column and ordered incursions of javelin throwers and mounted archers to perform lightning strikes along their flanks and retreating before crusader crossbowmen could retaliate. The flanks held, though.

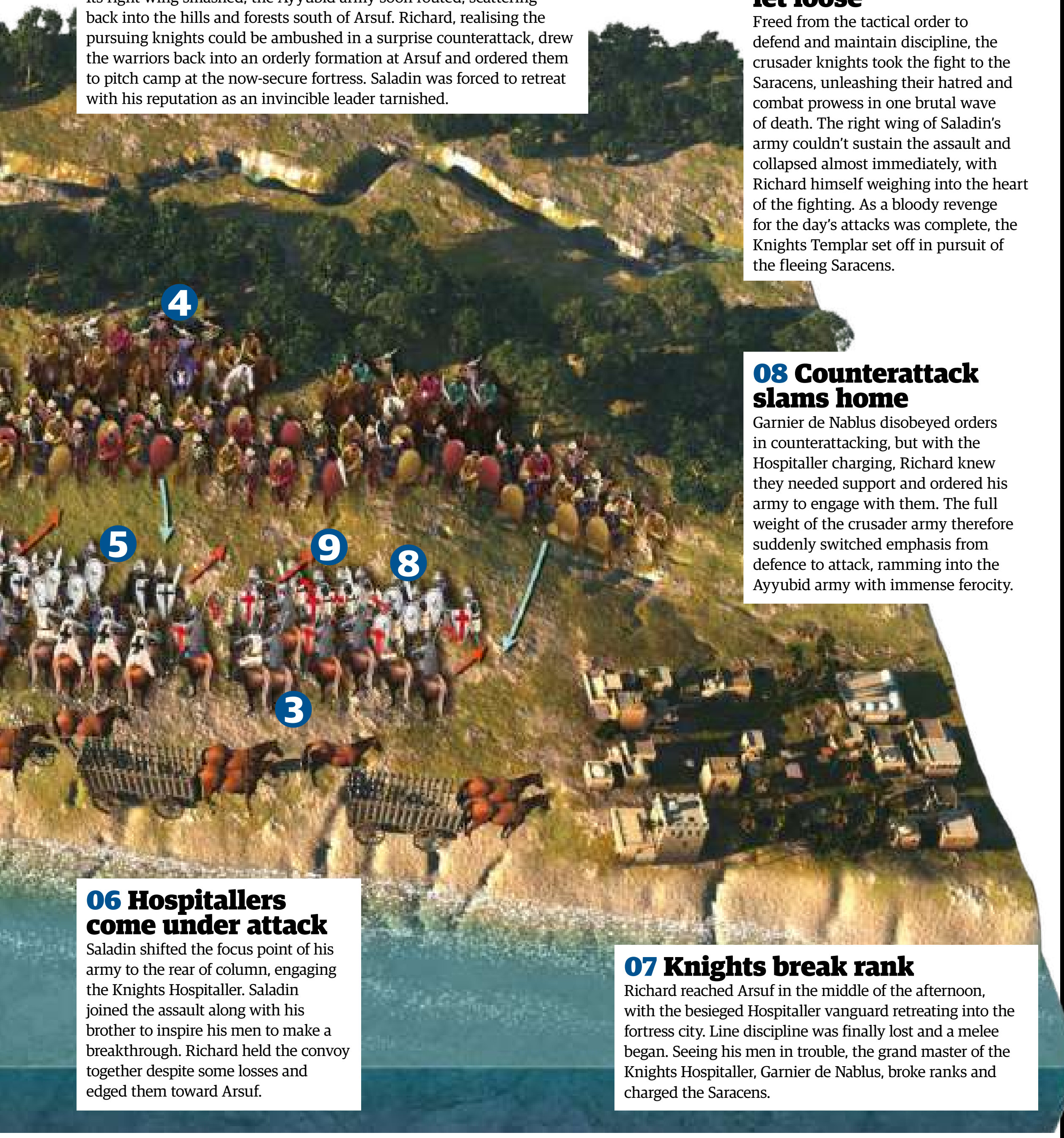
had established the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1099, had been ordered to be retaken by none other than the Pope in Rome. Richard, a devout and deeply religious king, had heeded the call. Here he now stood, ready to do his duty to the one true god. Conquering Acre was merely the first step in wresting Jerusalem from Saladin's iron grip.

So far the city's capture and wider crusade had been in the hands of a number of other leaders. These included Guy of Lusignan – a proud Poitevin knight and the supposed rightful king of Jerusalem through his marriage to Sibylla of Jerusalem – and King Philip II of France, who had helped raise the 'Saladin tithe' to pay for the crusade. The Duke of Austria, Leopold V, had overall command of the imperial forces.

There had been yet more leaders at the siege's instigation the previous summer, but illness and disease had claimed many over the winter months, with Frederick of Swabia and even the holy Patriarch Heraclius of Jerusalem all passing from this mortal world into the next.

The siege itself had stalled, so every passing week threatened to allow Saladin to outmanoeuvre

Counter seal (1195) of Richard I of England



10 Ayyubid army scatters

Its right wing smashed, the Ayyubid army soon routed, scattering back into the hills and forests south of Arsuf. Richard, realising the pursuing knights could be ambushed in a surprise counterattack, drew the warriors back into an orderly formation at Arsuf and ordered them to pitch camp at the now-secure fortress. Saladin was forced to retreat with his reputation as an invincible leader tarnished.

09 Templars let loose

Freed from the tactical order to defend and maintain discipline, the crusader knights took the fight to the Saracens, unleashing their hatred and combat prowess in one brutal wave of death. The right wing of Saladin's army couldn't sustain the assault and collapsed almost immediately, with Richard himself weighing into the heart of the fighting. As a bloody revenge for the day's attacks was complete, the Knights Templar set off in pursuit of the fleeing Saracens.

08 Counterattack slams home

Garnier de Nablus disobeyed orders in counterattacking, but with the Hospitaller charging, Richard knew they needed support and ordered his army to engage with them. The full weight of the crusader army therefore suddenly switched emphasis from defence to attack, ramming into the Ayyubid army with immense ferocity.

06 Hospitallers come under attack

Saladin shifted the focus point of his army to the rear of column, engaging the Knights Hospitaller. Saladin joined the assault along with his brother to inspire his men to make a breakthrough. Richard held the convoy together despite some losses and edged them toward Arsuf.

07 Knights break rank

Richard reached Arsuf in the middle of the afternoon, with the besieged Hospitaller vanguard retreating into the fortress city. Line discipline was finally lost and a melee began. Seeing his men in trouble, the grand master of the Knights Hospitaller, Garnier de Nablus, broke ranks and charged the Saracens.

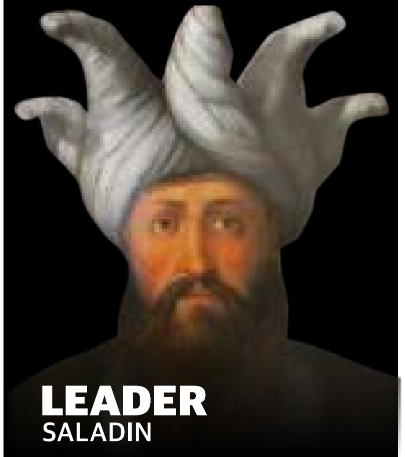
the crusaders. Richard, being the honed and experienced military leader that he was, realised this and after meeting with the other leaders, gave orders for vast siege engines to be built, ones that could bring down the city's walls. These engines, these machines of death, once completed, towered over the Christian knights and, when unleashed, brought the siege into a deadly endgame.

Colossal boulders rained down upon Acre's walls, smashing against them with thunderous brutality. Corpses of animals and Muslim soldiers littered the city's streets, spreading disease and sapping the morale of the terrified residents. Most fearsome of all though, flaming balls and arrows set ablaze anything that wasn't made out of stone, causing panic to quickly spread among Acre's populace. The surviving Muslim soldiers defended bravely, but the sheer carnage and chaos the machines and men of war now levied on the city was too much and, after a month of death and destruction, the remaining Muslim garrison within the city surrendered, which was a direct violation of Saladin's orders.

Upon receiving the news of Acre's fall, Saladin immediately set out for the city with reinforcements. On his way he received news that Richard had taken the surrendering Muslim garrison of 2,400 men captive and was offering their return for a ransom. Saladin, known for his fierce loyalty to his men and his wisdom, agreed to the ransom, which not only included significant

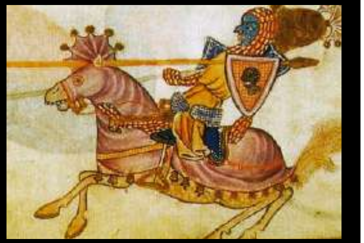
Muslims

NUMBER OF TROOPS:
25,000



LEADER
SALADIN

He attained his exalted position as leader of the Ayyubid army and founder of the Ayyubid dynasty and was a wise and experienced military commander.
Strength Respected tactical thinker and powerful politician.
Weakness Hands-off leader with little personal combat prowess.

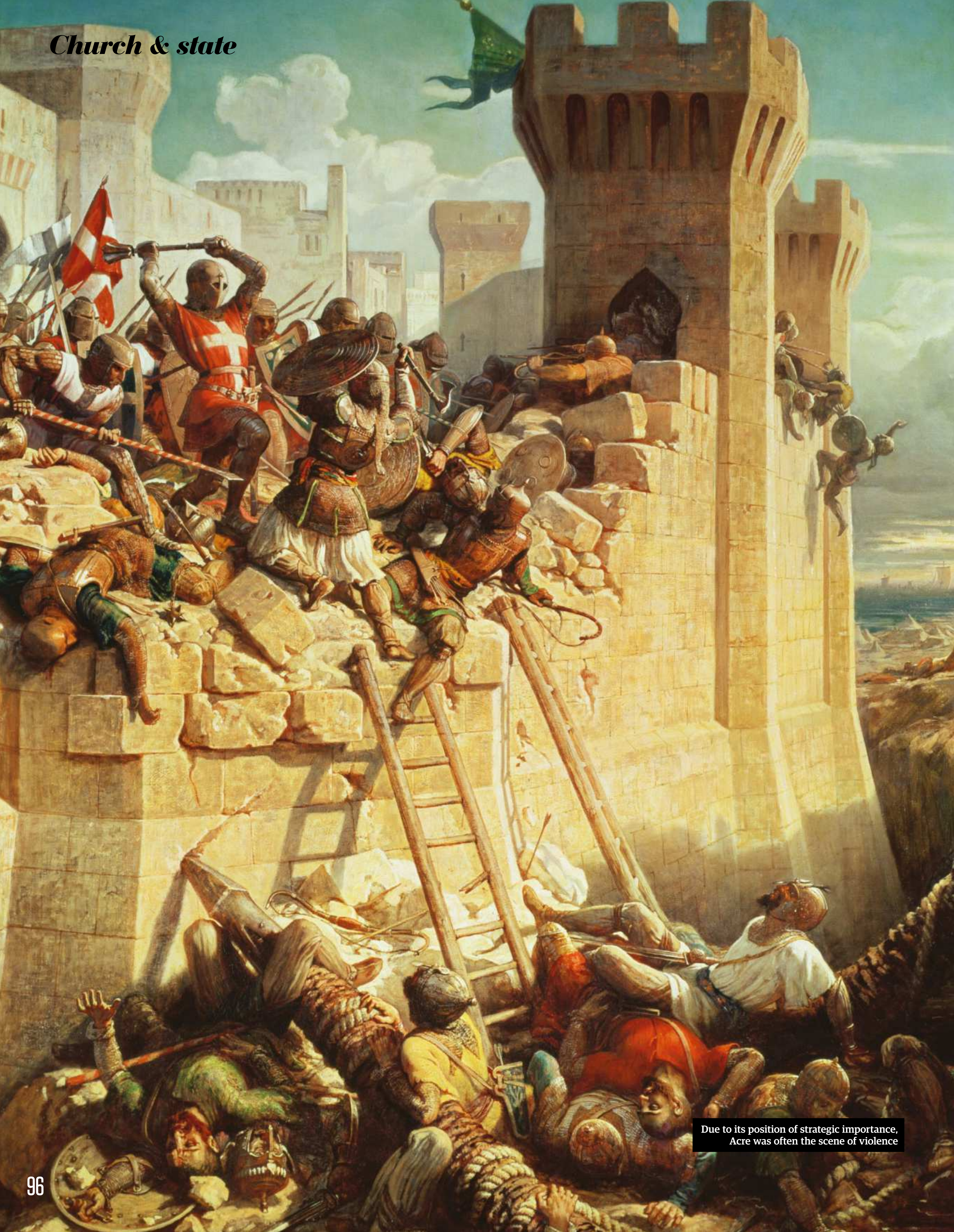


KEY UNIT
MOUNTED ARCHER

The light cavalry of Saladin was feared throughout the world due to its infamous ability to strike quickly and at range, with skilled marksmen riding the world's fastest horses.
Strength Fast units that excelled in ambush and hit-and-run attacks.
Weakness Easily cut down by knights in hand-to-hand combat.

KEY WEAPON
SHORT BOW

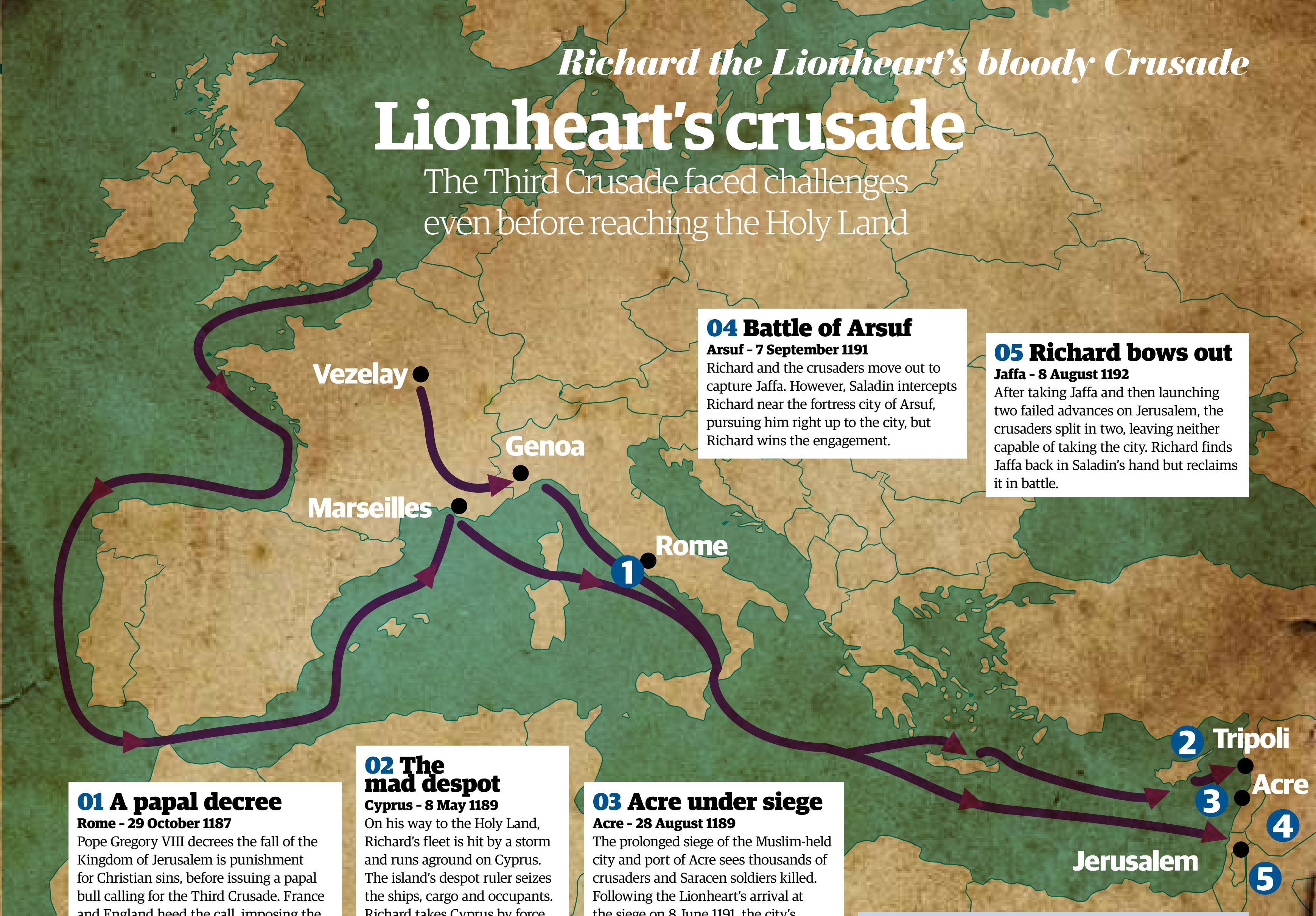
Saladin's mamluk infantry and his light cavalry units excelled in bowmanship, with their short bows used to pelt arrows at crusader forces at every opportunity.
Strengths Fast to shoot and reload with good stopping power.
Weakness Could be outranged by the longbow, and all-but-useless in hand-to-hand combat.



Due to its position of strategic importance, Acre was often the scene of violence

Lionheart's crusade

The Third Crusade faced challenges even before reaching the Holy Land



01 A papal decree

Rome – 29 October 1187

Pope Gregory VIII decrees the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem is punishment for Christian sins, before issuing a papal bull calling for the Third Crusade. France and England heed the call, imposing the 'Saladin tithe' to fund the mission.

02 The mad despot

Cyprus – 8 May 1189

On his way to the Holy Land, Richard's fleet is hit by a storm and runs aground on Cyprus. The island's despot ruler seizes the ships, cargo and occupants. Richard takes Cyprus by force, freeing the enslaved subjects.

03 Acre under siege

Acre – 28 August 1189

The prolonged siege of the Muslim-held city and port of Acre sees thousands of crusaders and Saracen soldiers killed. Following the Lionheart's arrival at the siege on 8 June 1191, the city's prolonged defence falters.

04 Battle of Arsuf

Arsuf – 7 September 1191

Richard and the crusaders move out to capture Jaffa. However, Saladin intercepts Richard near the fortress city of Arsuf, pursuing him right up to the city, but Richard wins the engagement.

05 Richard bows out

Jaffa – 8 August 1192

After taking Jaffa and then launching two failed advances on Jerusalem, the crusaders split in two, leaving neither capable of taking the city. Richard finds Jaffa back in Saladin's hand but reclaims it in battle.

> "They call this one the Lionheart and he is here to kill them all in the name of his god and glory"

monetary compensation but also the release of all of his Christian prisoners.

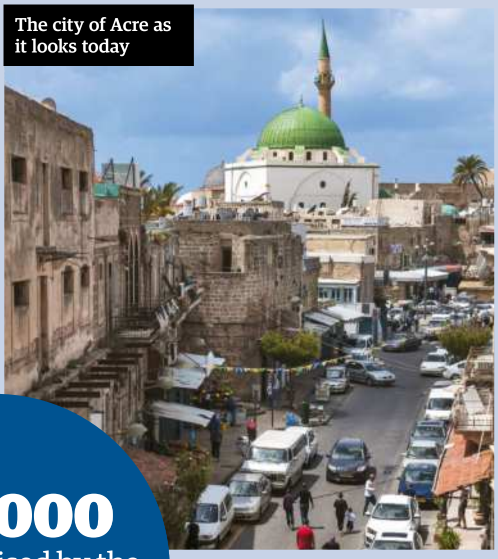
In Acre the banners of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, France, England and the Duchy of Austria fluttered in the light breeze. With Acre down, Richard knew that only the city of Jaffa to the south stood in their way of making a direct assault on Jerusalem, so he began making preparations for the continued crusade, as well as for the reparation of the sacked city. These preparations were swiftly interrupted by an argument that developed between the conquering leaders as to how the city should be divided up and to how the spoils of their victory should be apportioned. This quarrelling led Richard to strike down the Austrian standard from above the city's walls, slighting Leopold, as the king of England sided with Guy of Lusignan rather than Philip and Leopold over who should become king of Jerusalem when the city was taken. Philip and Leopold preferred fellow crusader and Italian nobleman Conrad of Montferrat, with Phillip so angry he threatened to return to Europe.

This cauldron of scheming and disagreement was tipped over the edge when Saladin delayed paying the garrison's ransom. An already irate and disgruntled Richard deemed the lateness a massive slight and ordered every single one of the garrison to be executed. Saladin reached the city just as the decision was made, but could only watch as man after man was publicly executed, their heads lopped from their shoulders atop the city walls. Thousands died. The enraged Saladin replied like-for-like, executing the 1,000 Christian prisoners in his custody. Whatever deal that could conceivably have been reached between the rival leaders now lay in ruins, seemingly as dead as the unfortunate prisoners.

Angered and frustrated with Richard and Guy, Philip and Leopold finally decided that their participation in the Third Crusade was at an end, leaving in late August for their European homes.

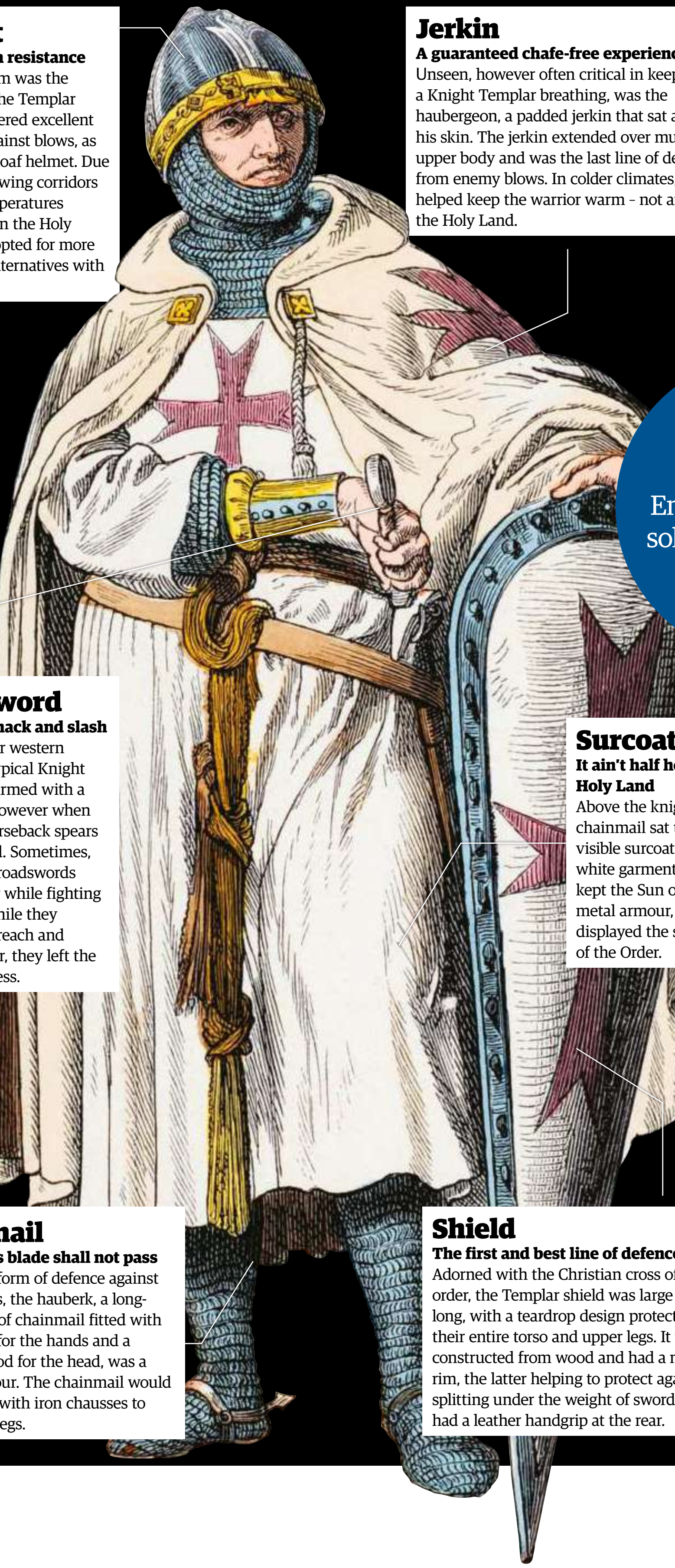
For Richard, though, such betrayal of faith was unimaginable, and after calling on Philip to do right in the eyes of God, managed to persuade him to leave behind 10,000 French crusaders, along with the necessary funds to pay for their upkeep.

£70,000
Amount raised by the 'Saladin tithe' to fund the Third Crusade


The city of Acre as it looks today

Anatomy of a Templar knight

The key kit and weapons carried by the most elite of Christian warriors



Helmet

Decapitation resistance

The great helm was the mainstay of the Templar Order and offered excellent protection against blows, as did the sugarloaf helmet. Due to narrow viewing corridors and high temperatures experienced in the Holy Land, many opted for more lightweight alternatives with open faces.

Jerkin

A guaranteed chafe-free experience

Unseen, however often critical in keeping a Knight Templar breathing, was the haubergeon, a padded jerkin that sat against his skin. The jerkin extended over much of the upper body and was the last line of defence from enemy blows. In colder climates, it also helped keep the warrior warm - not an issue in the Holy Land.

Broadsword

Designed to hack and slash

As standard for western knights, the typical Knight Templar was armed with a broadsword, however when fighting on horseback spears were also used. Sometimes, two-handed broadswords were opted for while fighting on foot, but while they granted extra reach and cleaving power, they left the knight shieldless.

Surcoat

It ain't half hot in the Holy Land

Above the knight's chainmail sat the visible surcoat. This white garment not only kept the Sun off their metal armour, it also displayed the symbols of the Order.

Chainmail

Thy enemy's blade shall not pass

The primary form of defence against enemy strikes, the hauberk, a long-sleeved shirt of chainmail fitted with chain covers for the hands and a chain coif hood for the head, was a knight's armour. The chainmail would be partnered with iron chausses to protect their legs.

Shield

The first and best line of defence

Adorned with the Christian cross of their order, the Templar shield was large and long, with a teardrop design protecting their entire torso and upper legs. It was constructed from wood and had a metal rim, the latter helping to protect against it splitting under the weight of sword blows. It had a leather handgrip at the rear.

The Lionheart was now the central remaining commander of over 20,000 crusaders, knights and soldiers alike and, burning with glorious purpose, ordered the continuation of the crusade, with the bulk of the crusading army marching out of Acre in August's final days. This was no doubt who was now leading this holy crusade.

The next city on the crusaders' relentless march to Jerusalem was Jaffa, an important port that provided passage into the southern Mediterranean Sea. As long as Jaffa remained untaken Saladin had a natural avenue to pour more of his troops into the region from his impregnable stronghold of Egypt, but if it fell to the crusaders Saladin would be forced to move men over land, a far less effective and more time-consuming proposition. The city also lay a mere 65 kilometres (40 miles) from Jerusalem, making it the ideal coastal base for crusaders. Before it could be taken, though, the crusaders needed to get there in one piece.

Richard knew Saladin was somewhere in the nearby area and, aware of his enemy's skill in arranging ambushes, ordered his troops to march down the Mediterranean coastline, with the baggage train protected by being nearest to the coast. This tactic prevented Saladin from attacking on one flank, as Richard also got his fleet to sail down the coast in parallel with them, shutting off the sea as an avenue of possible attack.

However, to the north of Jaffa lay the Wood of Arsuf, one of the only forested areas in all of the Levant. The woods ran parallel to the coastline for over 20 kilometres (12 miles) and had to be traversed by Richard's army if they were to reach Jaffa. After harassing Richard's troops with small hit-and-run attacks within the woods, Saladin sanctioned a full-scale assault on the crusaders, which led to the largest pitched battle of the Third Crusade. Saladin knew the battle would be decisive, but couldn't possibly have foreseen how disastrous for him it would be. As the Sun went down on 7 September 1191 the Saracen army had been routed in a decisive counterattack led by Richard's Knights Hospitaller. Saladin retreated from Arsuf to regroup what was left of his battered army and lick his wounds.

8,000

English knights and soldiers journeyed to the Holy Land

> "Saladin could only watch as man after man was publicly executed, their heads lopped from their shoulders atop the city walls"

The crusaders made a beeline for Jaffa, swiftly besieging and taking it. Despite some disagreement with the other crusader leaders, Richard - with Jerusalem almost in sight - decided to open negotiations with his enemy. Saladin, who was being questioned by some of his subjects following the defeat at Arsuf, agreed to the negotiations and sent his brother, Al-Adil to Jaffa to lead the talks. Despite headway being made - at one time Richard's sister Joan was being talked about as a potential bride for Al-Adil with Jerusalem as a wedding gift - the talks ultimately broke down.

The breakdown of the talks caused unrest in the crusader ranks, with arguments arising about the best way to proceed toward their goal. Richard, growing tired of the constant in-fighting, acted decisively and ordered the army to move on Jerusalem in November, first moving through Ascalon and then Latrun. The Christian army was soon at Beit Nuba, a mere 20 kilometres (12 miles) from Jerusalem. The news quickly spread of the crusaders' progress and the morale in the Muslim garrisons within the city crumbled. Saladin's forces had been crushed, Acre, Arsuf and Jaffa taken and Jerusalem looked set to be next. Victory for the Third Crusade seemed inevitable.

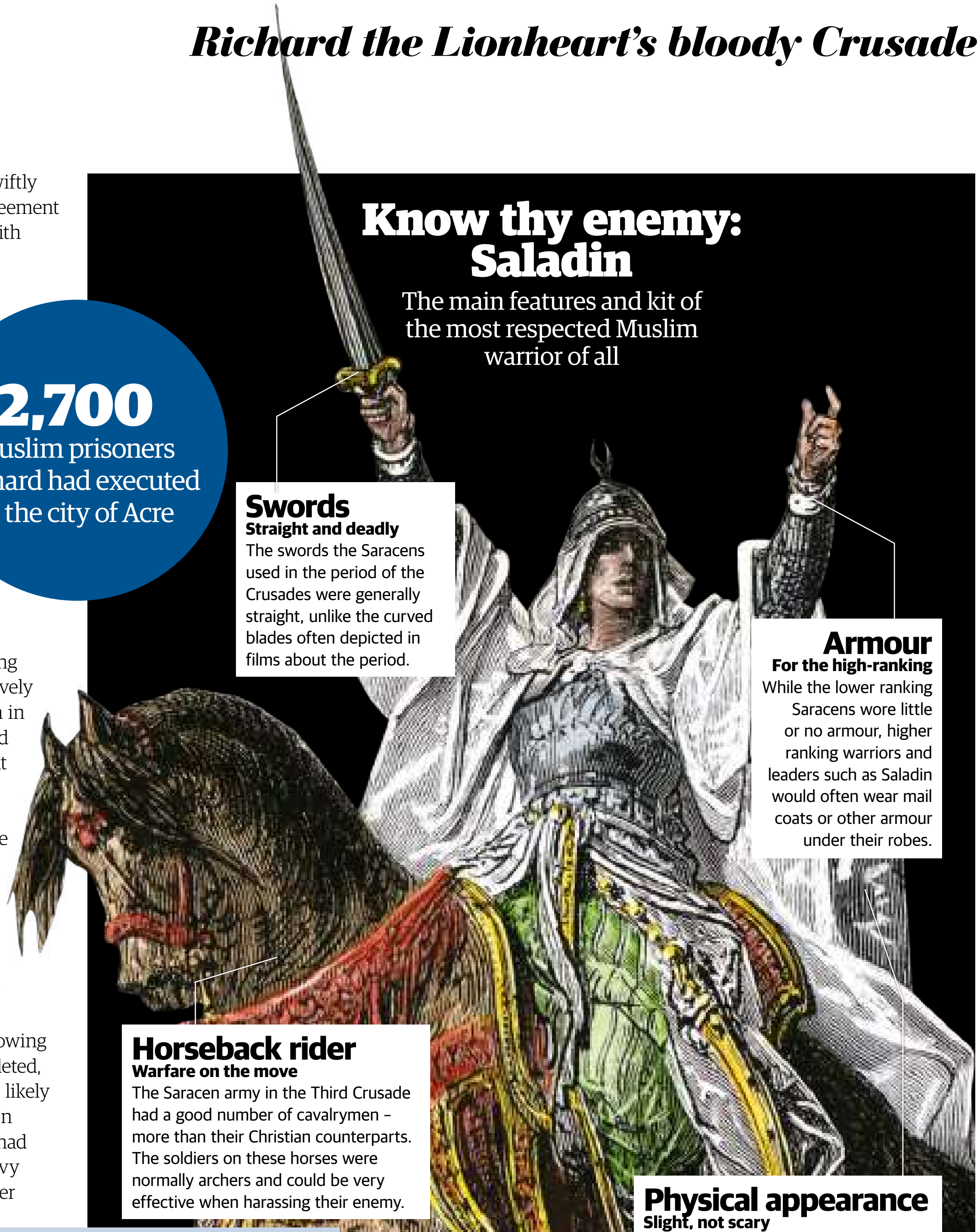
At this vital point hesitation crept into the crusader ranks, though. Saladin had proven himself a worthy and tricky foe and, not knowing the extent to which his forces had been depleted, Richard feared that a retaliation attack, most likely another large-scale ambush, was very near. In addition, the weather in the winter months had taken a marked turn for the worse, with heavy rain and hail leading to poor conditions under

2,700
Muslim prisoners Richard had executed in the city of Acre

The modern-day city of Jerusalem

Know thy enemy: Saladin

The main features and kit of the most respected Muslim warrior of all



Swords

Straight and deadly

The swords the Saracens used in the period of the Crusades were generally straight, unlike the curved blades often depicted in films about the period.

Armour

For the high-ranking

While the lower ranking Saracens wore little or no armour, higher ranking warriors and leaders such as Saladin would often wear mail coats or other armour under their robes.

Horseback rider

Warfare on the move

The Saracen army in the Third Crusade had a good number of cavalrymen – more than their Christian counterparts. The soldiers on these horses were normally archers and could be very effective when harassing their enemy.

Physical appearance

Slight, not scary

Most accounts of Saladin make reference to him being quite slight and frail – he did not have the imposing physical stature of Richard but was well respected for his wisdom and piety.

Salāh ad-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb (Saladin) was the first sultan of Egypt and Syria and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty. He was elevated to this lofty position through a series of military victories, first under the Fatimid government and then his own leadership, with him overseeing the decisive Battle of Hattin in 1187. It was due to Saladin himself that the Third Crusade was instigated, with the fallout from the Battle of Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem leading to the famous 'Saladin tithe', a tax levied in England and some parts of France to finance an army that was capable of reclaiming the holy territory.

Despite Saladin and Richard's armies clashing multiple times during the Third Crusade, the two men famously shared a more complicated relationship than would have been expected, with great respect reported on both sides. After the Battle of Arsuf – a battle in which Saladin's army was soundly beaten – Saladin sent Richard two excellent horses as Richard had lost his own in the battle. The two men never met in person, though, and Saladin died a year after the Third Crusade, struck down by a fever while staying in Damascus.

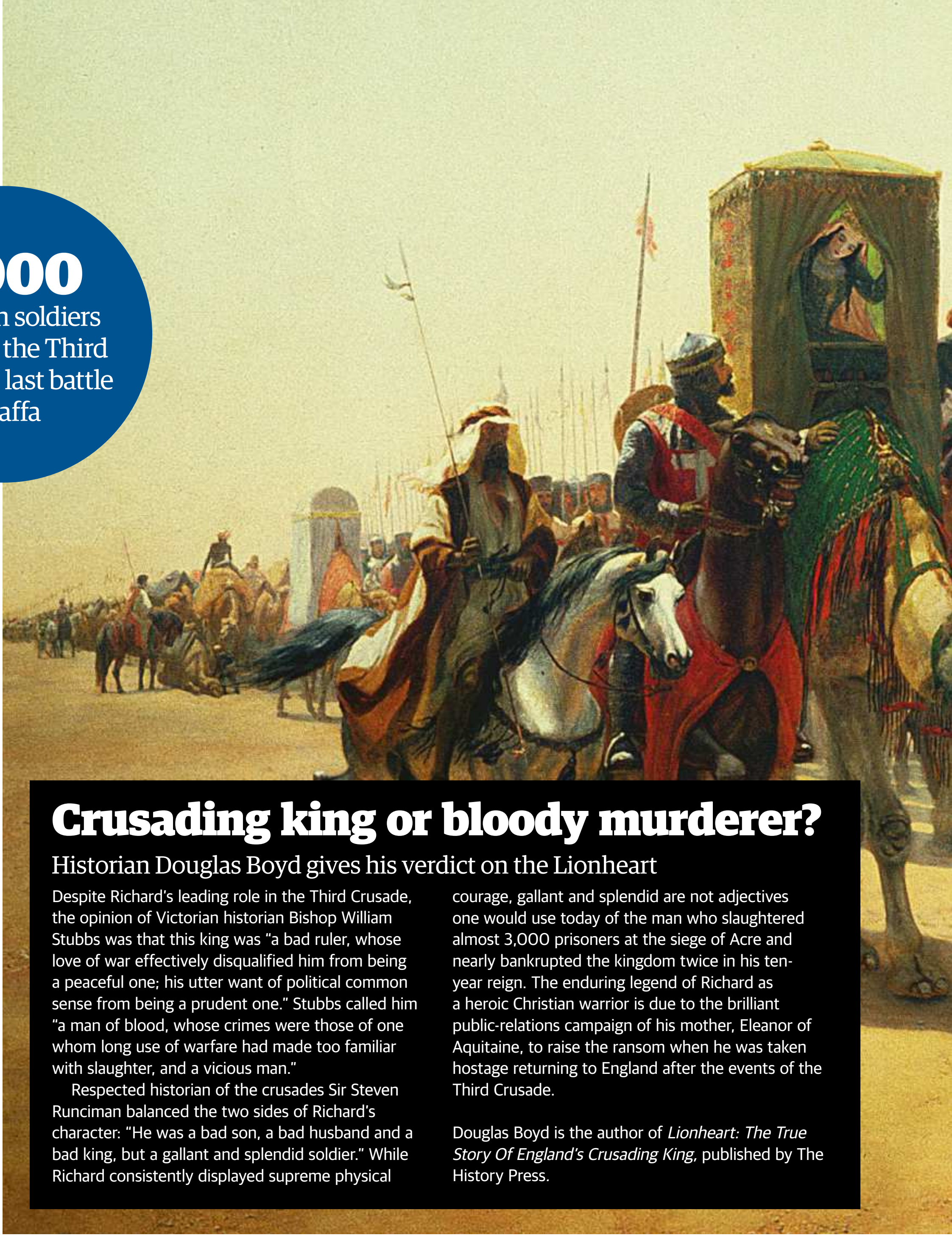
2,000
Christian soldiers fought in the Third Crusade's last battle at Jaffa

foot. These factors caused Richard to pause for thought rather than make straight for the holy city and he consulted his fellow crusaders. It was agreed that if they started besieging Jerusalem and were hit with a relieving force from Saladin, the generally poor conditions would lead to a massacre. As such, Richard ordered a retreat back to the coast. The attack would have to wait.

The invading army spent the rest of the winter months in Ascalon before continuing hostilities in the spring of 1192. Saladin, who had been forced by his emirs (commanders) to disband much of what was left of his army – the emirs favouring consolidation rather than open hostilities – launched no major attack. However, bands of Saracen troops constantly plagued and harrassed the crusaders, with a series of small fights and skirmishes slowly eroding the crusader army's numbers and morale. This came to a head on 22 May when the fortified town of Darum fell to the crusader forces after five days of bloody fighting. The crusaders had won great battles in the Holy Land but no more armies were journeying across the Mediterranean to bolster their forces; those men who fell in battle weren't going to be replaced. Richard's crusade was faltering, its primary purpose slipping away like sand in an hourglass.

The crusading king of England managed to marshal his remaining forces together for one last advance on Jerusalem, marching inland in June of that year. This time, far from being checked at Beit Nuba, the crusaders actually came within sight of the hallowed city. The time, it appeared, had finally come. Richard was to return Jesus' city to its rightful owners and reinstate Christianity as the dominant religious and military power in the Holy Land. However, as the tired, dusty and bronzed warriors stood there watching the distant city from afar, once more the poison of dissent started to seep through its leaders' ranks.

Despite standing before the city, months of resentment over the course the Crusade had taken boiled over among the military commanders, with debate over the best military course of action descending into personal attacks and squabbles. The majority of the leaders, including Richard, believed the best way to take Jerusalem was not besiege it but to attack Saladin directly in Egypt, thereby forcing him to relinquish it of his own free will as a bargaining chip to prevent his own fall. However, the leader of the surviving French crusaders, the Duke of Burgundy, Hugh III, believed the only course of action was an immediate and direct assault on the city. News of the split in the leaders' plans filtered down to the crusaders themselves, with the knights and soldiers now breaking previous allegiances and siding with one side or the other, splitting the crusader army in two.



Crusading king or bloody murderer?

Historian Douglas Boyd gives his verdict on the Lionheart

Despite Richard's leading role in the Third Crusade, the opinion of Victorian historian Bishop William Stubbs was that this king was "a bad ruler, whose love of war effectively disqualified him from being a peaceful one; his utter want of political common sense from being a prudent one." Stubbs called him "a man of blood, whose crimes were those of one whom long use of warfare had made too familiar with slaughter, and a vicious man."

Respected historian of the crusades Sir Steven Runciman balanced the two sides of Richard's character: "He was a bad son, a bad husband and a bad king, but a gallant and splendid soldier." While Richard consistently displayed supreme physical courage, gallant and splendid are not adjectives one would use today of the man who slaughtered almost 3,000 prisoners at the siege of Acre and nearly bankrupted the kingdom twice in his ten-year reign. The enduring legend of Richard as a heroic Christian warrior is due to the brilliant public-relations campaign of his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, to raise the ransom when he was taken hostage returning to England after the events of the Third Crusade.

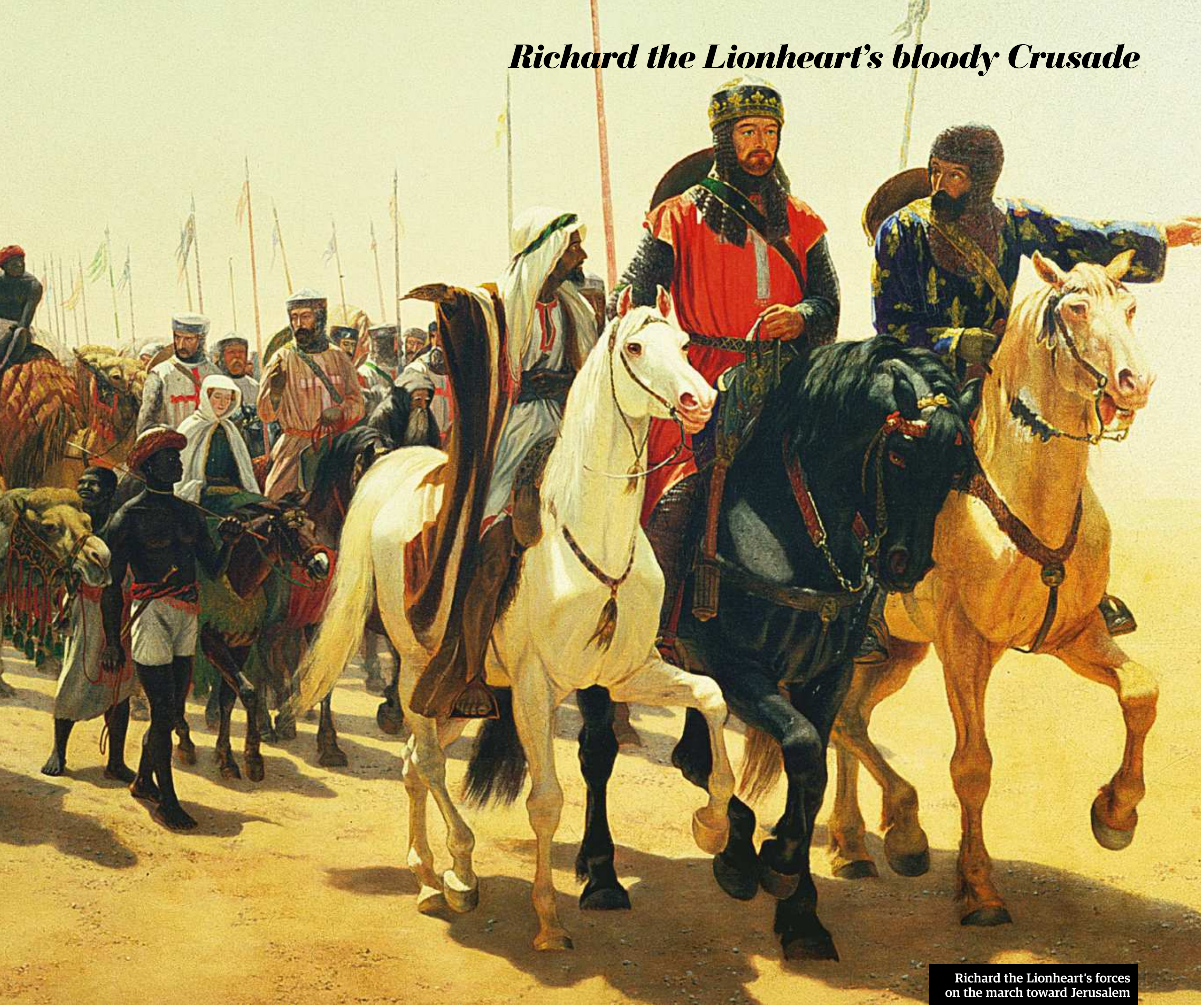
Douglas Boyd is the author of *Lionheart: The True Story Of England's Crusading King*, published by The History Press.

> "Richard believed the best way to take Jerusalem was not to besiege it but to attack Saladin directly in Egypt"

Neither of the two forces were now powerful enough to assault a city, let alone Jerusalem, and as such Richard was forced to order a retreat. While progressing back toward the coast, angry with the French, Richard decided to return to England. However, just as he was approaching Jaffa, news arrived via a scout that the city had fallen to Saladin, who had personally overseen the assault. Furthermore, the scout reported that the lives of all the people there were under a very real threat as the Muslim ruler had lost control of his army, the thousands of Muslim soldiers driven berserk due to the massacre at Acre.

With the lives of the surviving crusaders very firmly in his hands – after all, it had been Richard who ordered the Acre executions – a return to England would have to wait. With a band of 2,000 surviving knights and soldiers, Richard launched one final assault on Saladin, approaching Jaffa by sea in a surprise attack. The Ayyubid soldiers who had only just taken the city were completely unprepared for the attack and were soon overrun, with a combination of knights and crusader crossbowmen decisively breaking their resistance. The attack was so brutally effective that Saladin was forced to flee from Jaffa to the south.

This would be the final battle of the Crusade for Saladin and Richard. Following Jaffa's second fall, the region entered a limbo-like stasis, with the Christian crusaders and Muslim Ayyubids



Richard the Lionheart's forces on the march toward Jerusalem

Why was Jerusalem so sought after?

The geographical region of Palestine, between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, was referred to as the Holy Land by Christians and Muslims alike. Both religions claimed ownership due to an association with their faith, with the city of Jerusalem held in particular esteem. Both Islam and Christianity were Abrahamic monotheistic religions and as such, both sides considered the other to be unbelievers in the one true god and considered their presence heretical.

By the Third Crusade, Jerusalem and large parts of Palestine and the Levant region had changed hands again and again, with conflicts destabilising the region. Richard, coming from the Christian West, therefore perceived the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin's forces in 1187 as a direct attack on his faith. From Saladain's point of view he was merely taking back the spiritual heartland of his own faith; one that had previously rested in the hands of infidels.

sapped of any further willpower for bloodshed. The fighting had gone on for three years and large parts of the historic area lay in ruins. Tens of thousands of men, women and children had lost their lives and, despite some areas of the Levant changing hands, nothing had really changed. Jerusalem remained under Muslim control, Saladin was ruler of the Ayyubid Empire and Richard the Lionheart was still the fierce warrior king with a renowned reputation in Europe but without a firm foothold in the Holy Land. What had changed, though, was Saladin and Richard's desire for more war and bloodshed, and so a treaty soon followed. Jerusalem would remain under Muslim control but from now on, Christian pilgrims and traders would be permitted to visit the city, with their rights protected by law.

For Richard, the treaty was to be his last act in the Holy Land and the final curtain for the Third Crusade, with the king setting out on his return to England immediately after. His return journey, though, would not be as straightforward as the one there, with a series of events leading to his own capture, temporary imprisonment and yet more battles. However, the war he would go down in history for was his quest for the Holy Land – a journey full of bloodshed, plunder and religious fanaticism, but little territorial success. It ensured his legacy would forever be debated between those who see him as a crusading Christian king and others who view him as an amoral, cold-blooded killer, a debate that still rages on today.

17

Months Richard the Lionheart remained in the Holy Land

© Joe Cummings; Getty; Alamy; Thinkstock

Betrayal of the Knights Templar

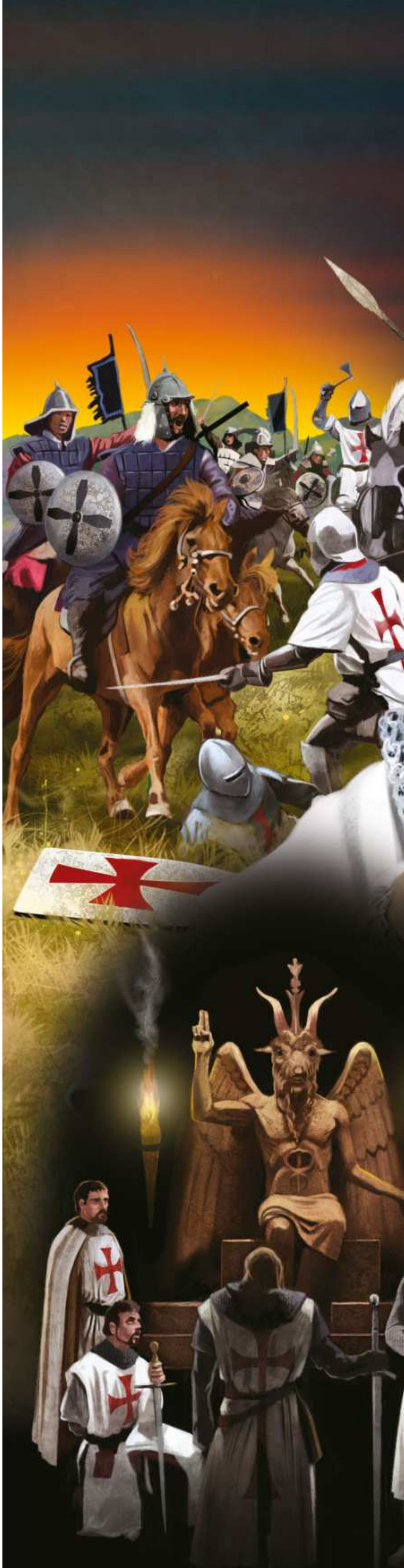
In seven years the Order was hunted, dismantled and executed. Was this justice for their sacrilegious practices, or were they the victims of a twisted plot?

Jacques de Molay was calm. Through seven long years of accusations, trials, torture, denials and confessions, he had been anything but calm, but as the frail, bearded man was led out onto the Île aux Juifs on the Seine, he did not weep or tremble. A crowd had gathered to watch the old man die, and a pyre had been erected on the small island, ready to be lit and claim his soul. De Molay was stripped of the rags that were once clothes, down to his threadbare shirt, then the guards strapped his thin, pale body to the stake. Finally, the silent man spoke. He asked to be turned to face the cathedral of Notre Dame, and that his hands be freed so he could die in prayer. These requests were granted, and De Molay bowed his head in silent prayer as the pyre was lit. The flames grew fast, and as the tongues of fire lashed up around his body, he spoke once more, his voice rising above the crackle of the flames.

"God knows who is in the wrong and has sinned!" he proclaimed. "Misfortune will soon befall those who have wrongly condemned us; God will avenge our deaths. Make no mistake, all who are against us will suffer because of us!" The flames rose higher, but the pain did not tell on his face. "Pope Clement, King Philip - hear me now!" His voice roared. "Within a year you will answer for your crimes before the presence of God!" After these final words, De Molay fell silent, and the flames claimed his soul.

Before the year was over, Pope Clement and Philip IV were dead. Clement finally succumbed to a long illness on 20 April 1314, and the French king died after a hunting accident on 29 November 1314, aged just 46. De Molay's order was all but extinct, but the curse of the last grand master of the Knights Templar would live on in infamy.

Jacques de Molay's famous last words may not have actually been spoken by the grand master himself. Like so many aspects of the Knights Templar, they have been distorted by myth and legend, and today we just don't know if he cursed his betrayers with his dying breath. Thanks to their



Key figures

The men who destroyed the Order, and those who fought to defend it

Jacques de Molay

1243 – 18 MARCH 1314

The 23rd and last grand master of the Knights Templar. Little is known of De Molay's early life, but he subsequently became the most well known Templar. He aimed to reform the Order, a goal he was never able to fulfil.

Philip IV of France

1268 – 29 NOVEMBER 1314

Also known as the Iron King, Philip led France from a feudal country to a centralised state. He had great belief in an all-powerful monarchy, and it was his ambition to fill thrones worldwide with his relatives. As well as destroying the Knights Templar, he also expelled Jews from France.

Pope Clement V

1264-1314

Born Raymond Bertrand de Got, Clement was made pope on 5 June 1305. There is some dispute over his loyalty to Philip IV, with some painting him as nothing but a tool for the French king, while others believing he showed surprising resistance. Either way, he is now remembered as the pope who suppressed the Knights Templar.

Guillaume de Nogaret

1260-1313

Keeper of the seal to Philip IV of France, Guillaume had previously played a role in the dispute between Philip and Pope Boniface; apparently persuading the king to kidnap the pope. He also had a central part in the fall of the Knights Templar, forcing members to give testimony against the Order.

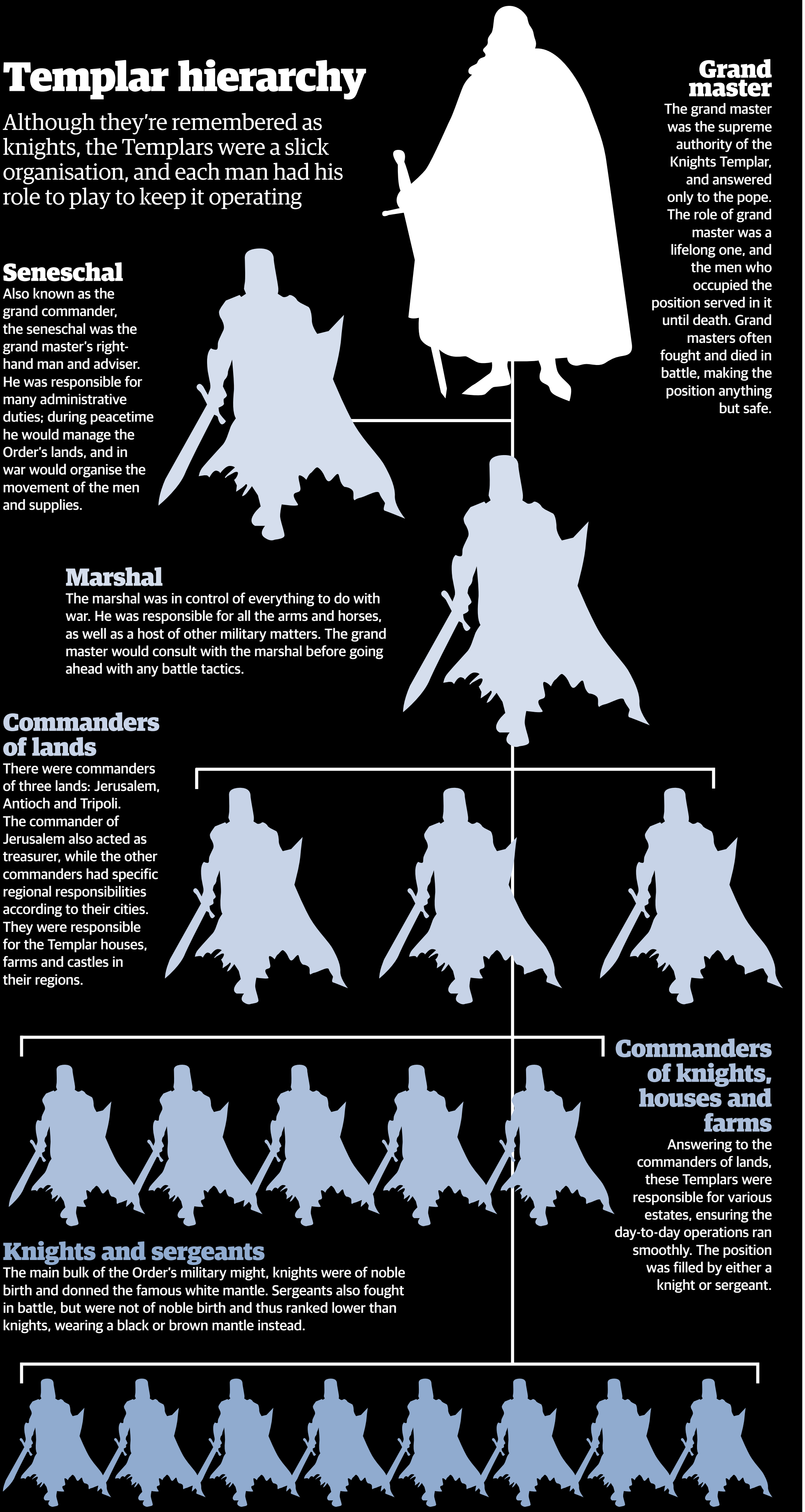
Geoffroi de Charney

UNKNOWN – 1314

Serving as preceptor of Normandy, Charney was a member of the Knights Templar from a young age and rose through the ranks. Like much of his order, he was arrested, tortured and confessed, then later retracted his statement. Charney was the only one of the three senior leaders arrested to rally by his master's side and deny the charges.

Templar hierarchy

Although they're remembered as knights, the Templars were a slick organisation, and each man had his role to play to keep it operating



Grand master

The grand master was the supreme authority of the Knights Templar, and answered only to the pope. The role of grand master was a lifelong one, and the men who occupied the position served in it until death. Grand masters often fought and died in battle, making the position anything but safe.

Seneschal

Also known as the grand commander, the seneschal was the grand master's right-hand man and adviser. He was responsible for many administrative duties; during peacetime he would manage the Order's lands, and in war would organise the movement of the men and supplies.

Marshal

The marshal was in control of everything to do with war. He was responsible for all the arms and horses, as well as a host of other military matters. The grand master would consult with the marshal before going ahead with any battle tactics.

Commanders of lands

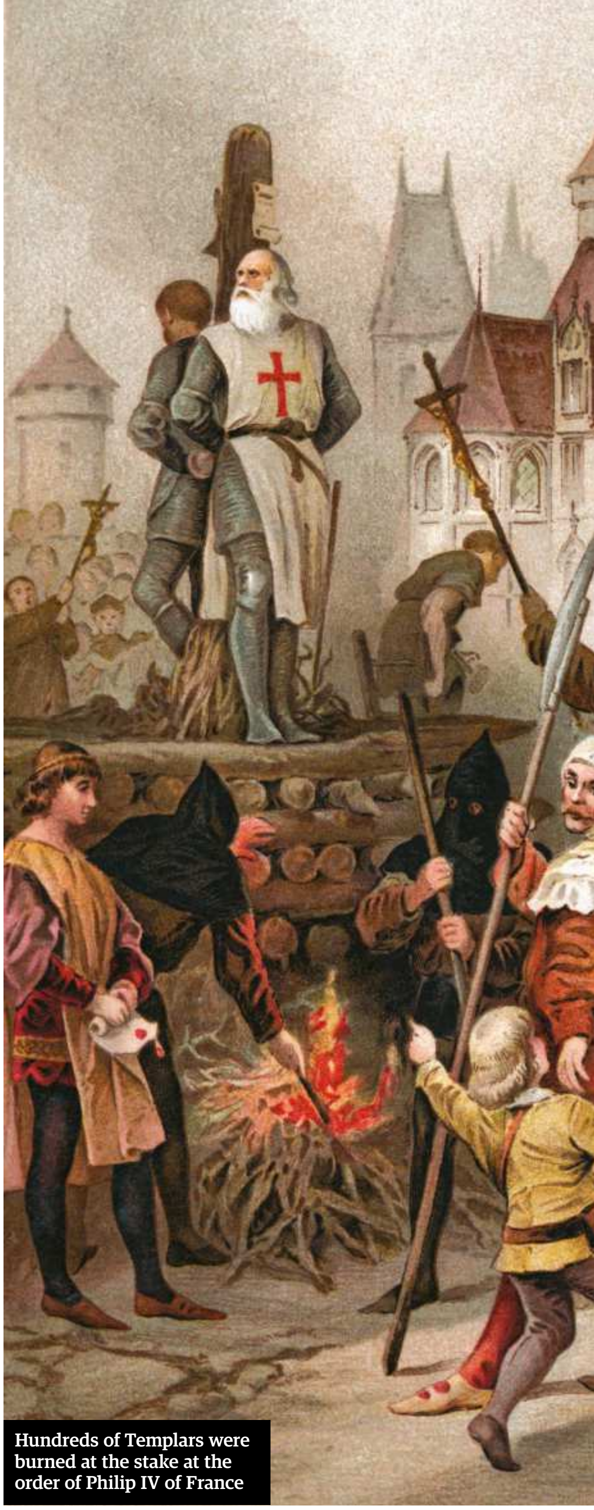
There were commanders of three lands: Jerusalem, Antioch and Tripoli. The commander of Jerusalem also acted as treasurer, while the other commanders had specific regional responsibilities according to their cities. They were responsible for the Templar houses, farms and castles in their regions.

Commanders of knights, houses and farms

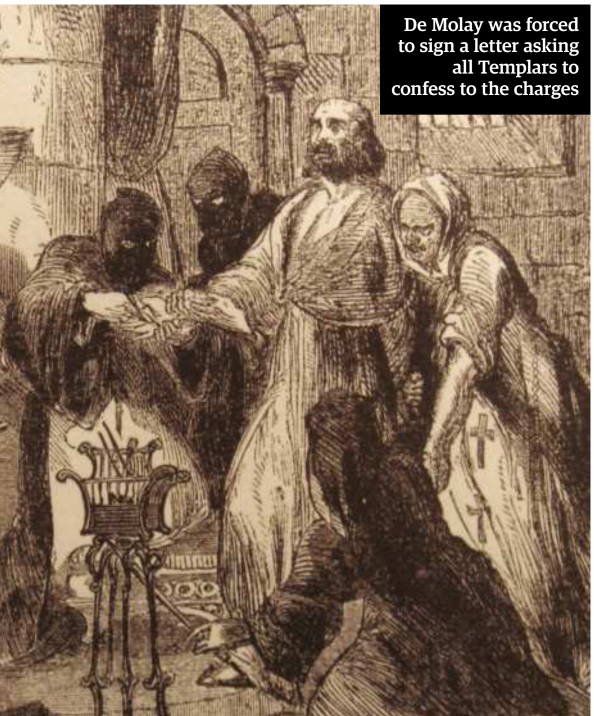
Answering to the commanders of lands, these Templars were responsible for various estates, ensuring the day-to-day operations ran smoothly. The position was filled by either a knight or sergeant.

Knights and sergeants

The main bulk of the Order's military might, knights were of noble birth and donned the famous white mantle. Sergeants also fought in battle, but were not of noble birth and thus ranked lower than knights, wearing a black or brown mantle instead.



Hundreds of Templars were burned at the stake at the order of Philip IV of France



De Molay was forced to sign a letter asking all Templars to confess to the charges

sudden and dramatic fall, an array of rumours, myths and conspiracies have persisted about the mysterious order, obscuring their true humble beginnings and devastating end that rocked 14th-century Europe.

After the city of Jerusalem was captured by Christian forces in the First Crusade, many European pilgrims chose to make the journey to the Holy Land. However, this route was not safe for the Christians to travel along, so several knights charged themselves with protecting the roads from robbers and brigands. This guild of knights was founded on Christmas Day 1119 on the spot that marks the place where Jesus was crucified. As their headquarters were located on the Temple Mount, they became known as 'Knights of the Temple', or Knights Templar.

Although the Order began in virtual poverty, relying on donations to survive, they quickly became one of the most powerful monastic orders in the Medieval world. With papal approval, money, land and eager young noblemen poured into the Templars' resources. Serving as the West's first uniformed standing army in their white tunics emblazoned with a fiery red cross, the Templars quickly achieved legendary status in battle.

This reputation as god's warriors was encouraged by their victory at the Battle of Montgisard, where 500 Templars helped an army numbering a few thousand defeat 26,000 of Saladin's soldiers. As well as being a mighty military force, they also controlled a vast financial network, which has been recognised as the world's first modern banking system. Many nobles who wished to join the crusades placed their wealth under the control of the Templars, who then issued them with letters of credit. This could be used at Templar houses around the world to 'withdraw' their funds. By the 13th century, the Templars were one of the most powerful and wealthy organisations in the world, entirely unaware that a dramatic and terrible fate awaited them. However, it would not be the Muslims in the East who would bring about their downfall, but their fellow Christians in the West.

After the fall of Acre in 1291, the West lost its last Christian possessions in the Holy Land. The Templars were cast out from their origins and stripped of their raison d'être. When Jacques de Molay ascended as grand master in 1293, he had one goal in mind – to reclaim what the Templars had lost. De Molay travelled across the West to rustle up support; he received it from Pope Boniface and Edward I of England. But the crusade was a disaster, and De Molay lost 120 knights trying to land in Syria. In 1306, the Templars supported a coup in Cyprus that forced Henry II to abdicate in favour of his brother.

These actions did not go by unnoticed. Many monarchs in countries with powerful Templar presences began to feel uneasy – with their power, what was to stop the Templars supporting baronial uprisings in their own countries? The Templars had also been very vocal in their desire to form their own state, similar to Prussia's Teutonic Knights and the Knights Hospitaller, another Catholic military order, in Rhodes.

In 1305, De Molay received a letter from Pope Clement V, then based in France, concerning the possibility of merging the Templars with the Hospitaller. De Molay was ardently against the idea, but in 1306 Clement invited both grand masters to France to discuss the issue further, instructing them to "come hither without delay, with as much secrecy as possible." De Molay arrived in 1307, but Foulques de Villaret, the leader of the Hospitaller, was either delayed or sensed something was amiss, as he did not arrive, and while the pope and De Molay waited, an entirely different subject of discussion was raised.

Two years previously, an ousted Templar had accused the Order of many criminal charges, and although they were generally believed to be false, King Philip IV of France had recently brought them back into discussion. De Molay, tiring of the ludicrous accusations, asked Clement to look into the matter to rid him of the whole messy situation. On 24 August, Clement wrote to Philip, saying that he did not believe the accusations but would start an inquiry "not without great sorrow, anxiety and upset of heart," and advised Philip to take no further action. Philip did not listen. At dawn on Friday 13 October, the king's forces arrested every Templar they could find in France.

Philip IV's harsh actions were not unprecedented; he had a reputation as a rash and violent king. Philip had previously clashed with Pope Boniface VIII, and launched an anti-papal campaign against him. Believing France should have centralised royal power, the feud escalated and ended with Philip attempting to kidnap the pope in 1303 to bring him to France to face charges of heresy. The

Templar mysteries

Holy Grail

The Holy Grail is perhaps the item that the Templars are most closely associated with. From Wolfram von Eschenbach's Medieval romance *Parzival* to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, throughout history the Templars have been linked to the mysterious item. Often in fiction the Templars are portrayed as the guardians of the cup that Jesus used in the Last Supper, or even a deep and dramatic secret. Interestingly, the city in which the Templars were launched, Troyes, is also the place that the very first grail romance was written. Any actual link between the Templars and the grail likely emerged due to the fact that stories of the grail became popular in the 12th and 13th centuries, when the Templars were at the height of their power. Even then, the Templar order was shrouded in secrecy, so it is little wonder that links were drawn between them and the mysterious vessel.

In numbers

20,000

members at their peak

54+

Templars burned to death in May 1310

15

witnesses gave evidence against the Order before 12 May 1310 – compared to 198 after

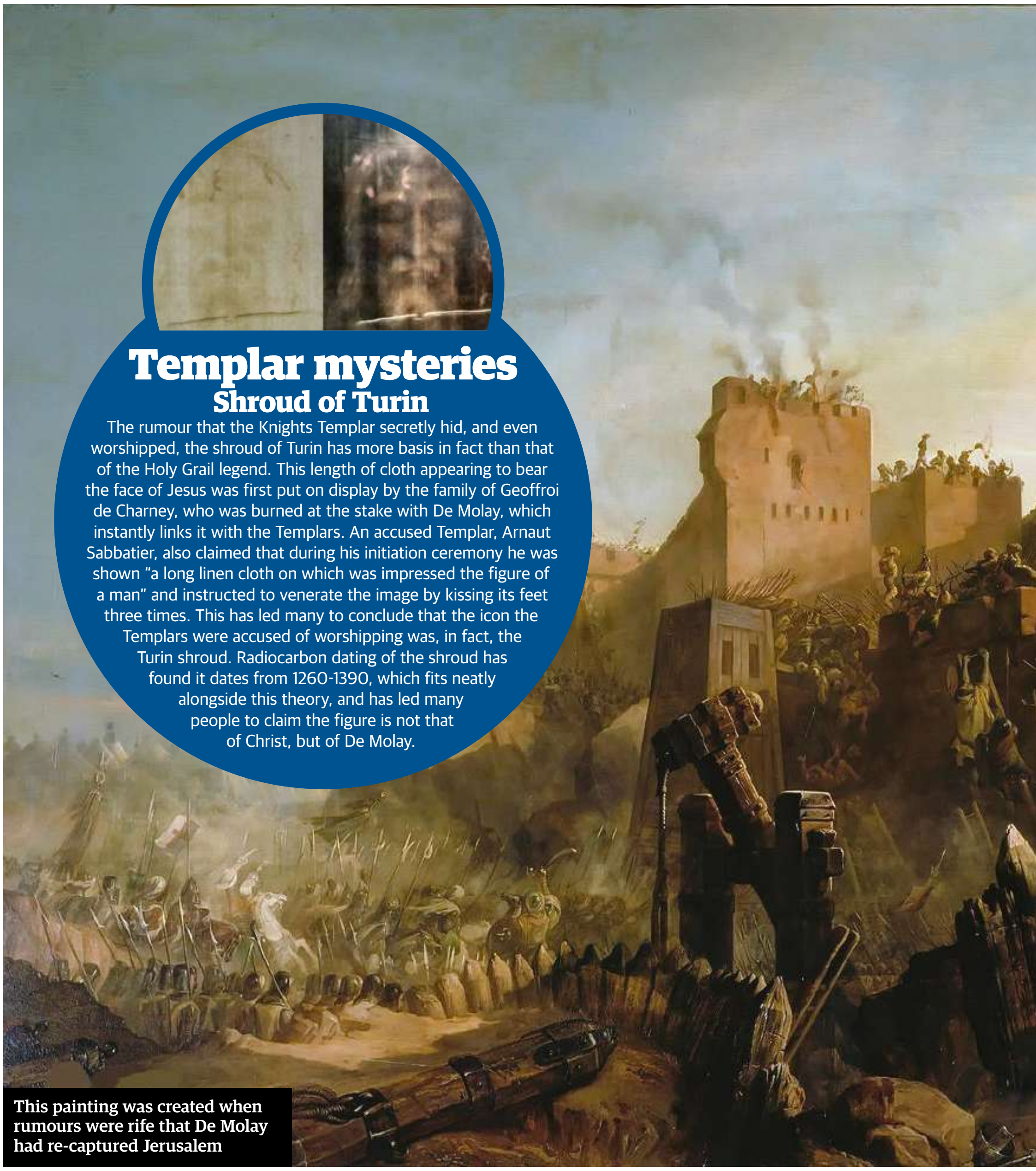
597

witnesses defended the Order before 12 May 1310 – compared to 14 after

9 knights were originally gathered to protect pilgrims

200,000

livres paid by the Knights Hospitallers to the French king as 'compensation'



This painting was created when rumours were rife that De Molay had re-captured Jerusalem

Templar mysteries

Shroud of Turin

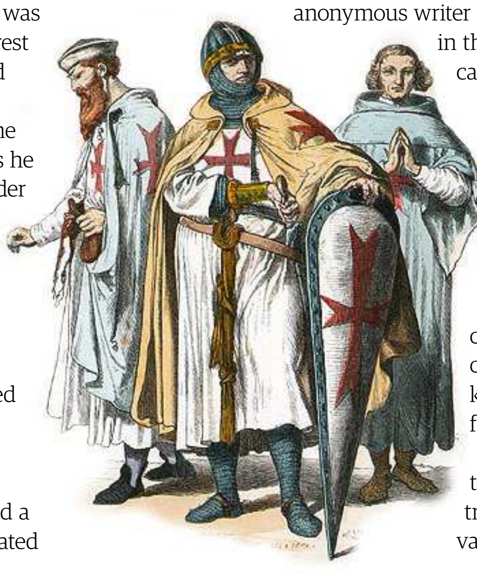
The rumour that the Knights Templar secretly hid, and even worshipped, the shroud of Turin has more basis in fact than that of the Holy Grail legend. This length of cloth appearing to bear the face of Jesus was first put on display by the family of Geoffroi de Charney, who was burned at the stake with De Molay, which instantly links it with the Templars. An accused Templar, Arnaut Sabbatier, also claimed that during his initiation ceremony he was shown "a long linen cloth on which was impressed the figure of a man" and instructed to venerate the image by kissing its feet three times. This has led many to conclude that the icon the Templars were accused of worshipping was, in fact, the Turin shroud. Radiocarbon dating of the shroud has found it dates from 1260-1390, which fits neatly alongside this theory, and has led many people to claim the figure is not that of Christ, but of De Molay.

shock ultimately killed Boniface, whose successor, Benedict XI, was then only in the position for nine months before his own death. This allowed the king to appoint his selection, Clement, to the papacy. Philip had also previously arrested wealthy Italian bankers in the city, stripping them of their assets; then his target switched to the Jews, who were thrown out of the kingdom. These actions can be easily explained - Philip had inherited a kingdom on the brink of financial crisis, and he also believed that his authority was above that of the pope. Not only did he owe the Templars a great deal of money, but their link to the church made them the perfect choice for establishing the power of the monarchy. With their plans to form their own state, the Order had basically sealed their own fate. The Templars had to fall for Philip to rise.

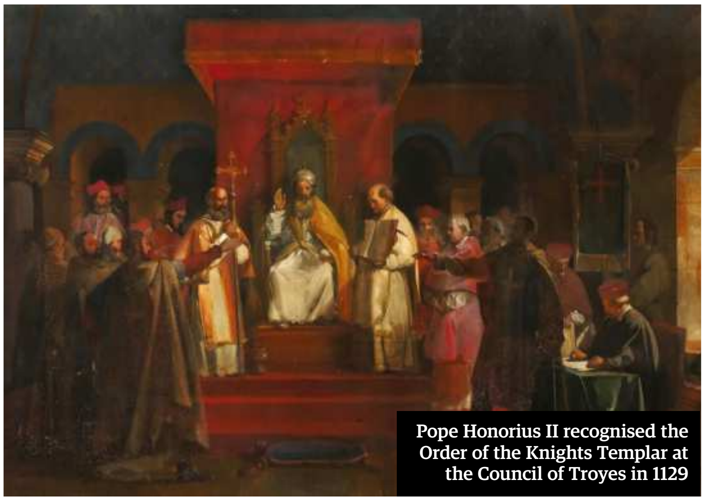
When the Templars in France were arrested, the charges put against them were heresy, sodomy, blasphemy and denying Christ. By charging them with heresy, Philip could paint himself as a soldier of Christ, similar to his sainted grandfather Louis IX. But his actions were a violation of the church in Rome's orders, and Clement was furious. Philip had likely believed the pope to be a frail and infirm old man and certainly not a threat, but Clement wrote angrily to Philip, accusing him of violating every rule in the book in this "act of contempt towards the Roman Church."

This did little to help the brothers of the temple. Some 15,000 Templars now resided in the prisons of France, many of whom were not nobles or knights, but mere farmers and shepherds. De Molay didn't escape capture either; just a day after acting as pallbearer at the funeral of the king's sister-in-law, the grand master was arrested along with the rest of his order. Philip seized their land and property and set about ensuring he obtained the confessions he needed to smash the Order to pieces.

There was one very simple way of acquiring confessions, and Philip employed it to great success: torture. Philip's inquisitors utilised a variety of horrific and demoralising methods to break the men's wills. The rack, which stretched a victim's body and dislocated his joints, was frequently used, as was strappado, which involved binding a victim's hands with rope that ran up a pulley, raising him in the air, then dropping him rapidly. The soles of prisoners' feet were greased then set alight with flame, teeth were pulled and limbs were flayed. The men were confined to cold, dark cells, and those who did not survive the torture were secretly buried. One anonymous writer in 1308 wrote of the conditions in the cells: "The human tongue cannot express the punishment, afflictions, miseries, taunts, and dire kinds of torture suffered by the said innocents in the space of three months, since the day of their arrest, since by day and night constant sobs and sighs have not ceased in their cells, nor have cries and gnashing of teeth ceased in their tortures… Truth kills them, and lies liberate them from death."



It is of no surprise that when the Templars were brought to trial, many confessed to the various offences put against



Pope Honorius II recognised the Order of the Knights Templar at the Council of Troyes in 1129

them. The Order was faced with five initial charges: the renouncement of and spitting on the cross during initiation; the kissing of the initiate on the navel, mouth and posteriors; the permitting of homosexual acts; that the cord they wore had been wrapped around an idol they worshipped; and that they did not consecrate the host during mass. Over the trials, the charges against the Templars grew and grew in number, ranging from burning infants to abusing virgins and even forcing young brethren to eat the ashes of the dead. Although these charges seem outrageous and somewhat farfetched today, Philip was operating at a time when paranoia and suspicion surrounding God and the devil was so rife that it could be reasonably believed that such devilish practices had infiltrated the church.

In hearings presided over by the inquisitors who had overseen the torture, 134 of 138 brothers confessed to one or more of the charges. De Molay himself signed a confession after undergoing the flaying of his limbs and testicles. This was quickly followed by matching confessions from all senior members of the Order. However, when Clement insisted the confessions be heard before a papal committee, De Molay and his men did an about turn. Safely away from Philip's control, De Molay retracted his confession, claiming he only gave it initially due to the torture he suffered. The other Templars followed suit and Philip's plans for a swift and brutal end to the Order vanished.

In an attempt to convince Clement, Philip visited him at Poitiers and sent 72 Templars to confess before him. He had his forces dispense pamphlets and give speeches concerning the depravity of the Templars. Philip warned that if the pope didn't act, he would have to be removed in order to defend Catholicism. Harangued, bullied and now under virtual house arrest, Clement gave in and ordered an investigation into the Templars. De Molay and the other senior members retracted their retractions and Philip's grand plans were in motion once again.

The Templars had nothing in the form of legal council; De Molay expressed desires to defend his order but was unable to as a "poor, unlettered knight." In 1310, two Templars with legal training made an impressive defence against the charges - insisting that the Templars were not only innocent but also at the sharp end of a cruel plot. The tide

The Templars across Europe

When the pope ordered Christian monarchs across Europe to arrest Templars, not all were willing

British Isles

Edward II was initially sceptical about the Templars' guilt and had no reasons to view them as a threat. He wrote to the pope in defence of the Order, but was eventually forced to arrest and try many Templars. Initially, torture was not allowed and all the Templars pleaded innocent, but when the pope's inquisitors took over, confessions came fast. However, they were spared burning and simply forced to repent publicly. Those who refused were incarcerated until death.

Italy

The situation in Italy varied. The Papal States unsurprisingly acted at once, but in Lombardy there was widespread support for the Order. For the number of Templars confessing to the accusations, there were just as many claiming the others were lying. In Florence, despite using torture, only six of 13 Templars confessed.

Cyprus

King Amaury de Lusignan had gained his crown thanks to the Templars, so was understandably reluctant to arrest them. However, the leading Templars were eventually incarcerated after putting up a brave resistance. At trial, there were many witnesses who praised the Templars, but the king was brutally murdered during the trial and Henry II, enemy of the Templars, regained the throne. Torture began almost immediately, and many perished while painfully protesting their innocence.

Portugal

The Templars in Portugal got off lightly compared to their counterparts elsewhere. King Denis I refused to persecute the Order, but could not overrule the papal bull to abolish the Templars. Instead, the Templars re-branded themselves as the 'Order of Christ' with the assured protection of Denis I, who also negotiated with Clement's successor for the Order to inherit the Templars' assets.

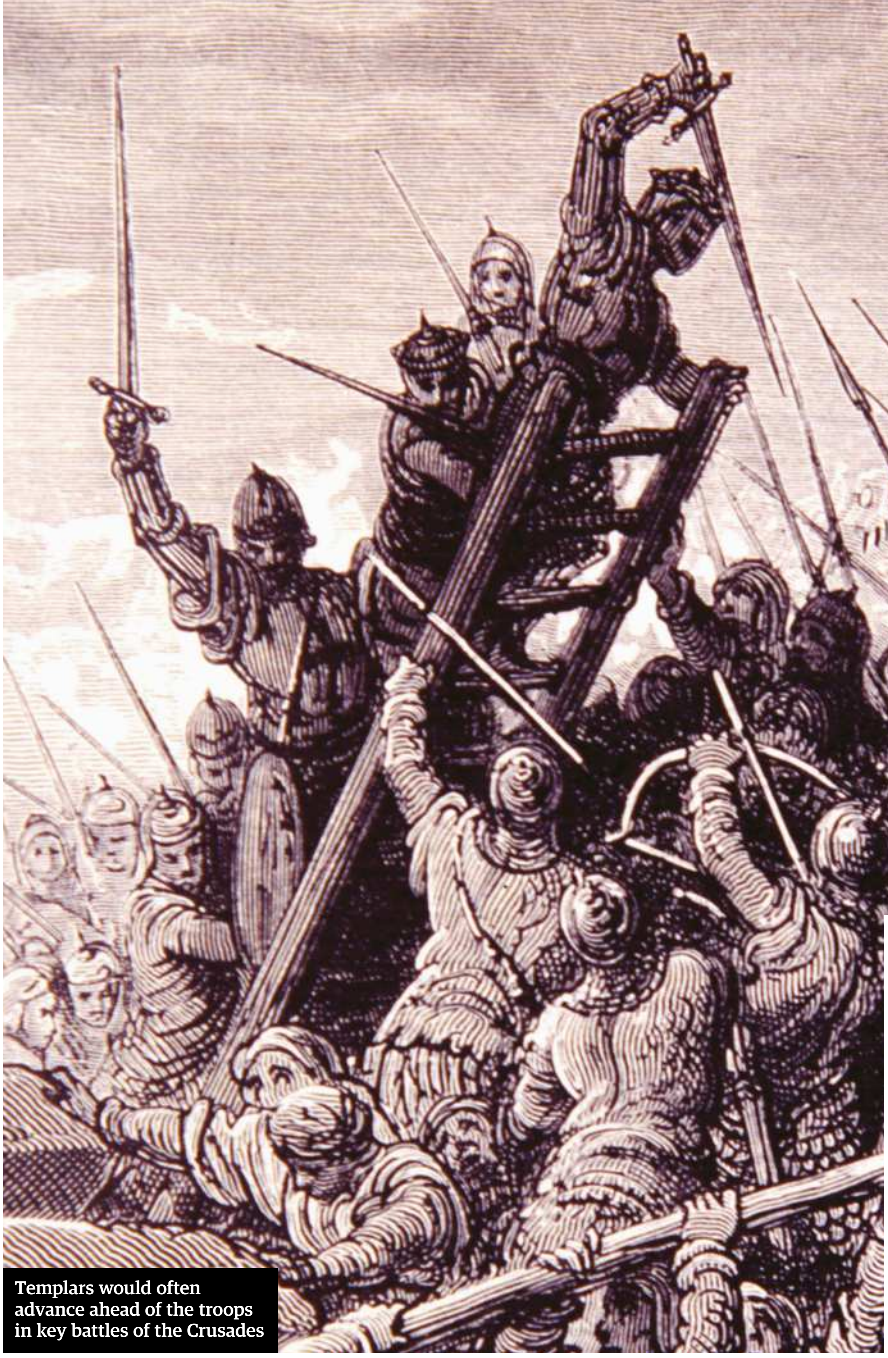
Iberian Peninsula

Despite initial doubts, James II of Aragon ordered the arrest of most of the Templars on 6 January 1308, before the pope ordered him to do so. However, many of the Templars set up defences in their castles and appealed for help, which unfortunately did not come. All of the Templars pleaded their innocence. With torture prohibited, no confessions were secured, and no Templar was condemned to death for heresy.

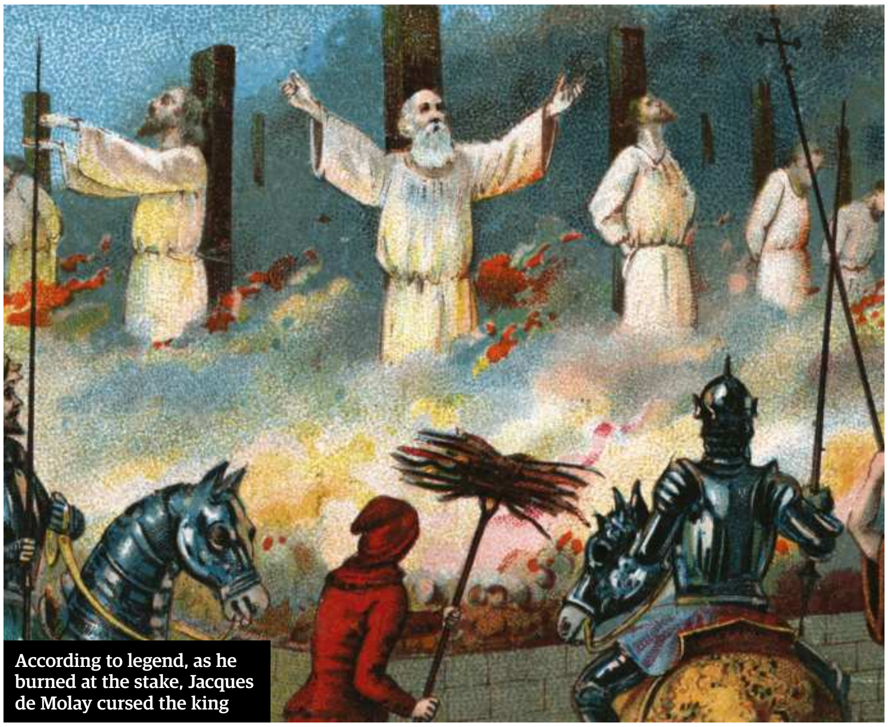
Guilty or innocent?

Was there any truth to the crimes the Templars burned for?

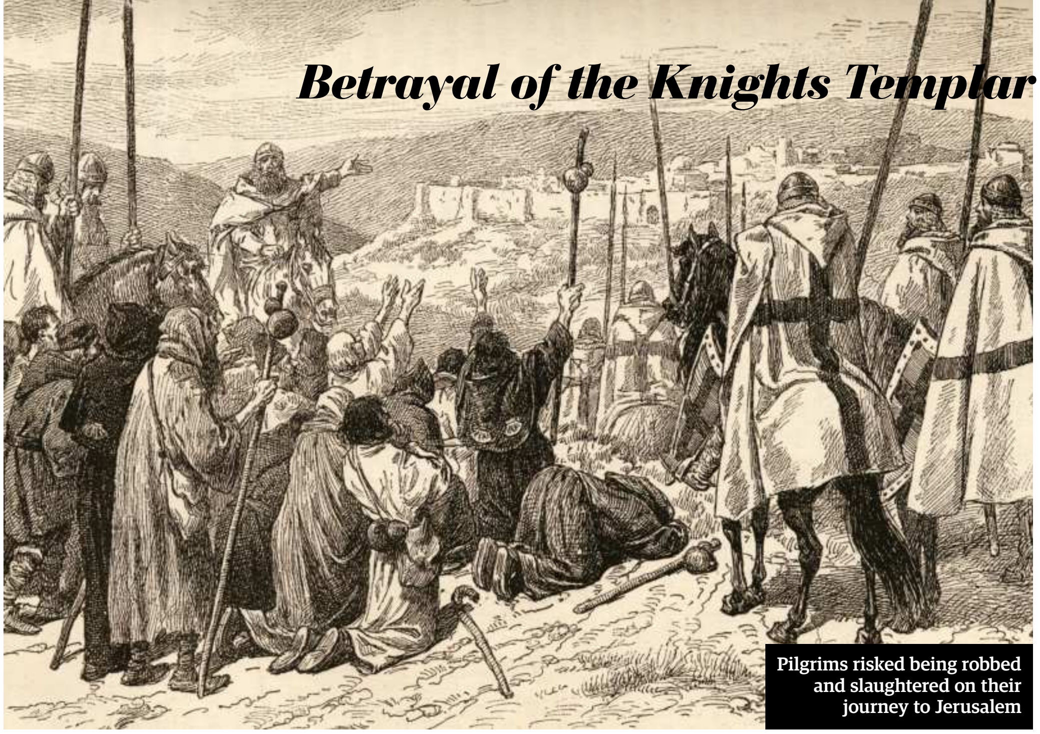
	For	Against
Spitting on the cross	Although often written as one of Philip's many trumped-up charges, there is evidence that this accusation had basis in fact. Not only did a number of Templars confess to it, but Philip's spies, who secretly joined the Order, confirmed it. A recent discovery of the 'Chinon Parchment' in the Vatican library further confirms the charges. Under questioning in 1308, Jacques de Molay admitted to such practices.	Although De Molay confirmed that spitting on the cross took place, chalking this up to heresy shows a lack of understanding. De Molay said these practices were designed to harden a Templar to the torture he would be subjected to by Saracens, training them to deny their faith "with the mind only and not with the heart." Philip's spies may very well have witnessed such acts, but they likely misunderstood their purpose.
Worship of an idol called Baphomet	The charge put against the Templars read "they surrounded or touched each head of the idols with small cords, which they wore around themselves next to the shirt or the flesh." Unlike Philip's other charges, this accusation was so specific to the Templars that it's difficult to believe he didn't have some inside information. Many knights did admit to worshipping this idol, which usually took the form of a life-sized head. We know for a fact that the Knights Templar possessed heads, such as the head of St Euphemia of Chalcedon. The fact that the Order kept these heads means that they certainly could have worshipped them in some way.	Only nine Templars in the Paris trials admitted to head worship, and descriptions of this 'idol' differed across Europe. In one version it was "covered in old skin, with two carbunkles for eyes," in another it was made of gold and silver; one had three or four legs, while in another account the head had horns. These conflicting accounts heavily indicate that these confessions were the result of torture. This idol was allegedly named 'Baphomet', but it may be the case that this was a mistranslation of 'Mahomet', ie Muhammad. Either way, if the Templars did indeed worship such an idol, it seems unusual that their temples were not filled with clear symbols of this figure.
Homosexuality	The charges the Templars faced were that "they told the brothers whom they received they could have carnal relations together… that they ought to do and submit to this mutually." As the Templars took vows of celibacy and were not permitted to wed, it was believed that they engaged in homosexual activity to satisfy their desires. Although few confessed, many testified that sexual activity was not prohibited. The fact that so many denied it under torture is an indication of just how shamefully sodomy was viewed, giving the Templars all the more reason to hide the truth.	This was the most common accusation used during this era to discredit or ruin anyone. Philip had already charged Pope Boniface VIII with very similar accusations, and it seemed to be his favourite tool to use against his enemies as it was difficult to disprove. However, despite the torture, only three Templars confessed to sodomy in the Paris trials. Although De Molay was quick to confess to denying Christ, he vehemently opposed this accusation, stating that the Templar rules clearly prohibit any such behaviour with harsh punishment, such as expulsion from the Order.



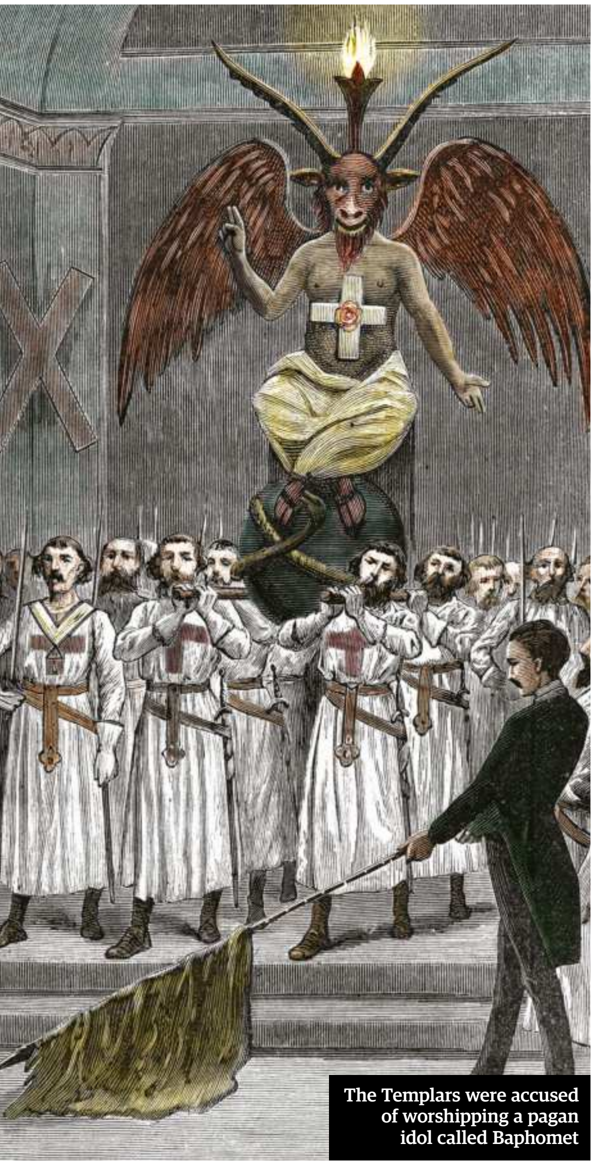
Templars would often advance ahead of the troops in key battles of the Crusades



According to legend, as he burned at the stake, Jacques de Molay cursed the king



Pilgrims risked being robbed and slaughtered on their journey to Jerusalem



The Templars were accused of worshipping a pagan idol called Baphomet

was beginning to turn in the Templars' favour, so Philip made a swift and brutal decision. On 12 May 1310, 54 Templars who had previously withdrawn their confessions were burned at the stake as relapsed heretics and the two Templar defenders disappeared from prison.

With nobody to defend them, the Templar case crumbled. Under extreme pressure from Philip and likely wishing to rid himself of the whole matter once and for all, Clement issued an edict that officially dissolved the Order. This didn't mean the brothers were guilty, but it was the end of the Knights Templar for good. Much to Philip's annoyance, a second papal bull was issued that transferred the Templars' wealth to the Hospitaller. Finally, the bull 'Considerantes Dudum' allowed each province to deal with the Templars residing there as they saw fit. The fate of the leaders, however, was in the hands of the church.

De Molay and three of his senior members languished in prison, awaiting news of their fates. Finally, on 18 March 1314, the leaders were led out to a platform in front of Notre Dame to hear their sentences. All four were old men; De Molay was, by now, at least 70, while the others ranged from 50-60. Due to their earlier confessions, they were found guilty of heresy and condemned to life imprisonment. Two of the men silently accepted their fate, but faced with living out the rest of his life starving in a dank, dark cell as the last leader of a humiliated and disgraced order, De Molay finally found his voice. To the shock of the crowd, and the horror of the cardinals, the grand master and his loyal master of Normandy, Geoffroi de Charney, loudly protested their innocence. They denied their confessions, insisting their order was nothing but holy and pure. For seven years of imprisonment, De Molay had failed to defend his order, but now he was doing it – with his life.

This was completely unexpected, and left the cardinals confused about what to do. When the news reached Philip, he was furious. He ruled that as the Templars were now professing their innocence, they were guilty of being relapsed heretics, the punishment for which was death by fire. Before the end of the day, De Molay and De Charney were dead. Instead of living out his final days disgraced in a cell, De Molay's final moments of bravery led many to hail him as a martyr.

The remaining Templars were not released from their monastic vows and many were subjected to penances such as lengthy prison sentences. Others joined the Knights Hospitallers and some were sent to live out their remaining days in isolated monasteries. Even with these numbers accounted for, there are still question marks over what happened to the tens of thousands of brothers across Europe. The Order's archive was never found along with the majority of their treasures, leading many to believe that the Templars received some sort of warning, allowing many to escape prior to the initial arrests. Various conspiracy theories regarding the fate of the remaining Templars have been concocted, from the proposition that they escaped on a fleet of ships to western Scotland to them becoming Swiss freedom fighters. Although we do know the sad tale that ended the Order, the mystery of what became of the remaining Templars is likely to stay unsolved.

Templar mysteries

French Revolution

When Louis XVI was executed by guillotine at the height of the French Revolution, according to some sources a man jumped up onto the platform and dipped his fingers in the blood. He cried out "Jacques de Molay, thus you are avenged!" Then the crowd cheered. The legend that the Templars would enact revenge upon the French monarchy who had damned them was popular at the time, so speculation that they played a part in the revolution was rife. This legend works alongside the idea that the remaining Templars went underground, so relies on quite a leap of faith. Regardless of its veracity, Jacques de Molay did indeed have his revenge.

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The birth of Magna Carta

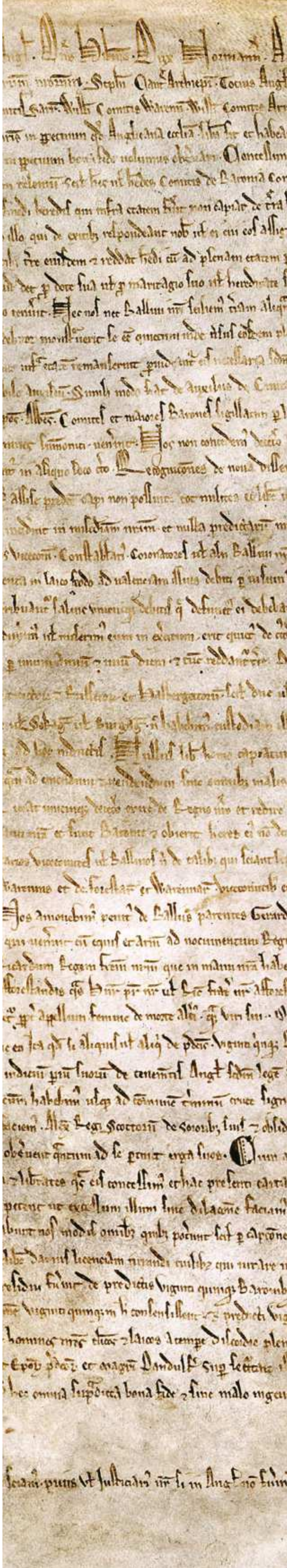
In the time that 'Bad' King John would earn his infamous moniker, a band of nobles would force a wayward monarch to finally respect the needs of the realm

By the time the First Barons' War erupted, the landscape of royal authority had changed. The actions of the uncooperative King John I would push his most privileged nobles to revolt against him and demand the monarch be contractually obliged to serve his people as they had served him. It was ultimately a disagreement between selfish men – a monarch who needed coin to rebuild the realm and win an unwinnable fight, and a group of barons who wished to protect their own coffers from royal fingers – but it was the first attempt to make a king legally bound to follow the rules. These were the seeds of British parliamentary democracy, sown in the early years of the 13th century.

The origins of *Magna Carta* begin with the actions of the third Plantagenet king, John I. Even before his royal ascension, John was already a controversial figure. While his elder brother, Richard the Lionheart, was characteristically absent from the realm during the Third Crusade in 1191, John attempted to unseat his sibling by forming a secret alliance with French king Philip II. The coup failed, and Richard forgave him, but it proved John was a calculating figure who was willing to cause friction to get his way, an attribute that calcified following his coronation in 1199.

John's desire to restructure the realm came to blows with the kingdom his warmongering brother had left behind. When he wasn't seeking glory in the Holy Land, Richard resided in France, visiting England only when official occasions demanded it. This absence had helped the barons, the highest and most influential tier of the English nobility, to grow richer and more powerful, and it was here that John found the most resistance to his rule.

That resistance would be made all the worse by his relationship with both France and the Church. While John had managed to exert English control over both Scotland and the rebellious state that was Ireland, France was another matter.



An unknown author

While we know who signed *Magna Carta*, it seems we might never know who actually authored it

Surviving clauses

Three legal concepts from the original version survive in British law today, including the banning of unusual punishments, trial by a jury of one's peers and the preservation of justice.

A lost original

Seven copies were made of the original, four of which survive to this day. However, the version that John signed to begin with has likely been lost.

Private goldmine

The only copy of *Magna Carta* that resides in private hands was sold at auction in 2007 for $21.3 million (approximately £17.3 million).

Shakespearean omission

Magna Carta formed a defining chapter of King John's reign, but it's never mentioned or referenced in Shakespeare's play about him.

> “They formed a contract that held the king accountable for the first time in the history of the English throne”

England’s control over the heavily fortified region of Normandy – and John’s desire to focus his attention on the minutiae of governing his own kingdom – led to the Treaty of Le Goulet in May 1200, which saw Philip accept John’s inherited ownership of his late brother’s French lands in exchange for John’s recognition of Philip as overlord in his stead. The decision weakened England in the eyes of barons and earned John the rather unseemly moniker of ‘Softsword’.

History presents John as a king who desired order and control above all else – and that desire led him to clash with almost every other form of authority in the land. His desire to limit the influence of Rome in English affairs saw him excommunicated in June 1209, which only served to distance him from the disenfranchised nobility around him. By 1213, John was forced to recognise papal authority once again, but his relationship with Rome was irrevocably damaged, with Pope Innocent III even proclaiming that anyone who chose to overthrow the king would be lawfully entitled to do so.

John’s reign descended into further turmoil when the anti-French nobles he’d formed alliances with rebelled against him. John had been forced to take action to reclaim Normandy for the English throne, but the campaign was costly and ended with John’s forces being crushed at the Battle of Bouvines in 1214. John had lost his most significant territory on the continent, exhausted what coin he’d managed to reinvest into the economy, and fractured his royal authority beyond repair.

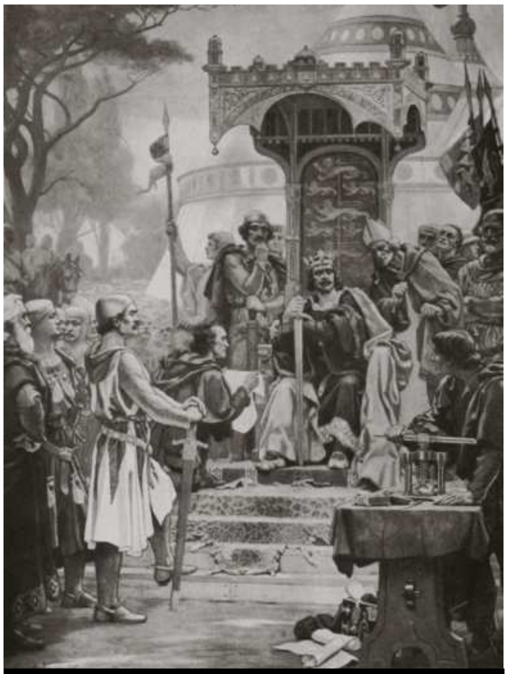
> *Magna Carta* was written on parchment in Latin, with many words abbreviated in order to save on space

There was blood in the water upon John’s return to England, and the barons were already circling. John’s means of funding his ill-fated campaign in France, an aggressive form of taxation upon the rich resources of the nobility, had left a sour taste in the collective mouths of England’s richest class. A wound that festered all the more with John’s intrusive form of governance – prickly and intransigent, the king’s desire to oversee every facet of his realm had forced the nobility to conceal and protect their affairs. The barons had had enough – the king was a force accountable only to himself and something had to be done.

Supported by Philip, the barons rebelled against John and his ever-more rapacious taxation policies, with those in the north and north-east of England rallying to the call to revolt. With John’s public profile in tatters, more and more disenfranchised nobles joined the cause, and in April 2015, the forces of the rebels began heading south. By May, the rebels had renounced all fealty to John and marched on London. John was secretly attempting to gain support from Rome, announcing his desire to lead a crusade to the Holy Land. However, it was all in vain as the rebelling barons took London and forced the king to flee.

So John, knowing a civil war was simply untenable, met with the heads of the revolt at the water-meadow of Runnymede, 20 miles from the centre of the capital. It was here the rebels presented their legal expectations to the crown, formed into a document known as the *Articles of the Barons*. It was in this manuscript that the principles of *Magna Carta* were forged. Divided into two sections, the *Articles* did not represent a one-sided demand but the end result of weeks of negotiations between the king and the barons.

The first section was divided into 48 paragraphs, setting out the individual clauses to which the rebels had forced the king to concede. It stated that the customs and liberties granted by the king should be granted in turn to all landowners, thus



This fresco, which was painted in 1900, shows King John meeting with the rebel barons to eventually sign *Magna Carta* into law

Defining moment

Coronation of King John 1199

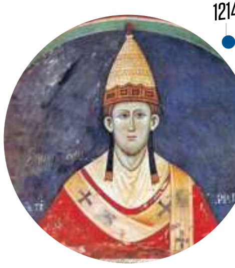
Despite attempting to take the throne via a coup during Richard I’s involvement in the Third Crusade, John eventually becomes king of England when his brother passes away in France in 1199. Now the most powerful man in the realm, John began one of the most tumultuous rules in English history. A constant battle with the pope and a series of threats to his position as king weakened his power base, while his bellicose approach to taxation would force a contingent of his nobility to rebel, leading to the first stirrings of parliamentary democracy on English soil.

Defining moment

King John signs Magna Carta 1215

By signing *Magna Carta*, John effectively diminishes the power of the Crown in its own realm and sows the seeds for democracy in England. John disagrees with almost every clause of *Magna Carta*, including the fact he could no longer demand money from the nobility, that every freeman had the right to a fair trial and that the church should have an executive vote in the running of the country. John hates the document, and even has it briefly destroyed, but the impact of his agreement has already spread like wildfire.

Timeline



1214

Innocent III assumes papal control
Pope Innocent III bans priests from administering most of the sacraments then excommunicates John in 1209. Five years later, he resumes papal influence.
21 April 1214

1215

Barons’ Revolt takes Tower of London
Heavy taxation and bizarre legislation force a band of barons to defy the king, spiralling into a full-on revolt. This movement leads them to take the Tower of London.
17 May 1215

1215

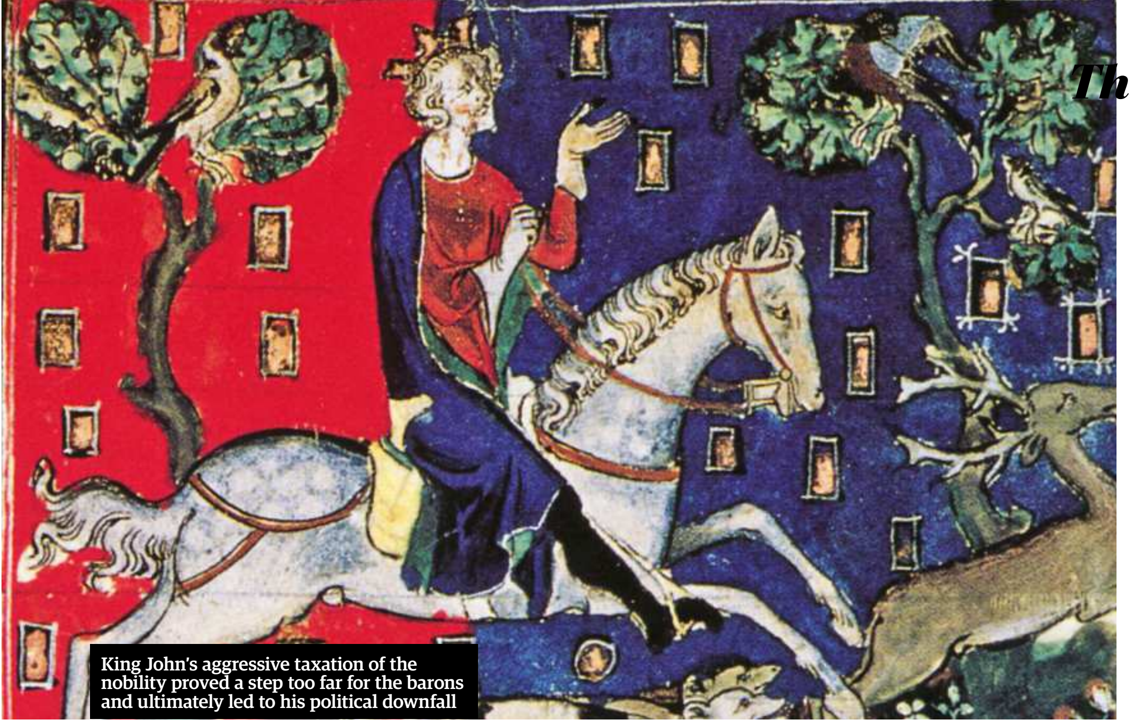
Meeting at Runnymede
Realising he can’t defeat the Barons’ Revolt by force, John is forced to meet the rebels at Runnymede to discuss their demands in the *Articles of the Barons*.
10 June 1215

1215

Peace restored in England
While the king attempts to play down the importance of *Magna Carta*, the damage is already done. With the barons re-swearing allegiance to the Crown, peace is effectively restored.
19 June 1215

1215

***Magna Carta* begins to spread**
The first seven copies of the lengthy *Magna Carta* document are finished and sent around the realm to ensure the treaties John has agreed to are seen and known by the English people.
24 June 1215


King John's aggressive taxation of the nobility proved a step too far for the barons and ultimately led to his political downfall

extending the terms of the charter from the barons to the entire realm. These clauses were more of an informal legislation - the request that all freemen be granted a fair trial by their peers being far too complicated a matter to settle overnight - but they nevertheless formed a contract that held the king accountable for the first time in the history of the English throne.

The second section of the *Articles* represented a security clause to protect the document, with 25 unnamed barons acting as guarantors of sorts. It's here we find the very first evidence for the creation of a baronial committee to ensure the demands of the *Articles* were adhered to by the king. The document also contained a clause enabling the archbishop of Canterbury and his fellow bishops to issue their own charters, thus preventing John from seeking papal annulment. With the king's Seal affixed to the bottom, the time had come to formalise this into a document that would be distributed around the realm as proof of the king's assent: *Magna Carta*.

Magna Carta, rewritten by hand into seven initial copies and resealed by the king, was carried across the realm, signalling the beginning of a new age for England. It was also, in the short term, something of a failure. In the centuries to come it would help form a progressive step forwards for the English statute of law, but in the months following John's concession to the rebels, it was largely impossible to enforce. Those 25 barons and the king distrusted each other intensely, and with the pressure of Clause 61 - which stated the king's castles and lands could be confiscated if he failed to meet the conditions of the charter - hanging heavy on John's shoulders, further conflict was inevitable.

By 15 August, the rebels refused to vacate London as part of the peace deal agreed with the king. And with an official decree from the pope arriving a few months later (deeming *Magna Carta* unlawful), England was thrown into a civil war known as the First Barons' War. The anti-royalist barons then reached out to the son of Philip II, Louis VIII, offering to support his own claim to the English throne in support for military aid. The war raged well into 1216, with John's health eventually failing due to dysentery on 19 October.

While the men involved in its creation became blinded by distrust and greed, *Magna Carta* itself survived. Revised to welcome John's son and heir, Henry III, to the throne in 1217, the landmark document finally began to have a tangible effect upon the realm. Not every clause would be followed, and many would be cannibalised on their way into English law, but its roots in the desire for an accountable leader would reverberate all the way to the English Civil War in the 1600s and beyond.

Magna Carta is an extensive document. A modern English translation runs to a total of 4,922 words

Magna Carta was a triumph for the people of the realm, and this tribute, installed in 2015, stands as a testament to that legacy

The legacy of Magna Carta on Medieval law

While it took almost a century for the fundamental legal ramifications of *Magna Carta* to be felt in the life of an English everyman (mainly because it was written to make the king accountable for breaches of the law, rather than the people), that didn't mean the document wasn't influential. Even as a symbolic document, *Magna Carta* sent ripples across the surface of Medieval legislation in a way no other legal charter had ever managed before.

As the Great Charters were steadily revised and introduced, the people of the realm found new legal precedents that changed the landscape of how Medieval law was enacted. For instance, those who believed a sheriff was in breach of their role as a representative of the Crown could cite *Magna Carta*, since these individuals were meant to officially propagate the rule of the king throughout the land. By 1350, half of the clauses in *Magna Carta* were no longer valid in English law, but the fact these points of legislation even existed in the first place provided a legal foundation that ensured further refinements could be made in the future. Principles such as the right to a fair trial by one's peers may have taken centuries to come into effect, but the fact a king agreed to honour such a principle was truly symbolic.

Defining moment

Edward I confirms Magna Carta 1297

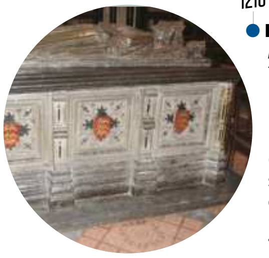
In 1297, King Edward I was in desperate need of funds, but he was unable to force money out of the nobility lest he suffer a similar fate to his forebear King John. In order to lawfully enact a new tax and keep his nobles on-side, the king is forced to royally reaffirm *Magna Carta* and its previous revisions. It is this version that remains in the British statute of law to this day, although it should be noted that a number of clauses were repealed by Edward and subsequent kings as England began to transition into a military powerhouse.

1215

Pope annuls *Magna Carta*
Magna Carta was far from safe, and with John choosing to submit entirely to Rome, Pope Innocent III signs a papal bull that deems the document null and void.
24 August 1215

1216

King John dies
Despite Rome's attempts to curtail the document, *Magna Carta* becomes popular among the people. 14 months after it was first signed, John dies at the age of 49.
18 October 1216



1216

First revision of *Magna Carta*
The late King John's body is barely cold before the first revision of *Magna Carta*, under the supervision of the Earl of Pembroke (the new regent), is released.
12 November 1216

1217

Second revision of *Magna Carta*
Almost a year to the day since the first, a second revision of the document is made official, seeing changes made to taxation and the protection of the people's civil liberties.
6 November 1217

1225

Henry III reissues *Magna Carta*
By the time that Henry III comes of age and assumes the throne, *Magna Carta* has been officially integrated into the English statute of law.
11 February 1225

© Alamy

Isabella of Castile's Spanish Inquisition

Synonymous today with brutality and torture, the Spanish Inquisition was actually established under the rule of one of Spain's most renowned and civilised monarchs

Isabella had been born for this moment. If the 23-year-old princess felt anything other than serenity and conviction, it did not show on her face, her expression betraying nothing as she processed into the church of San Miguel, Segovia, Spain. At last the day had come, and she was to take her place as the queen of Castile and Leon, the largest of the Iberian Peninsula's fragmented kingdoms.

The whole city had come forth to witness her triumph. Only hours before, they had buried the old king and now, his successor, bestride a white horse and adorned with jewels and riches to display her power, came to deliver them from the chaos and disorder that had plagued the people for so long.

Surrounded by her new subjects, Isabella proclaimed her intentions towards the beleaguered kingdom with grace and authority. There would be peace and stability, she promised, and, above all, she would uphold the church that was the cornerstone of her world. Religious unity and peace would reign once again in the Iberian Peninsula. God had decreed it through her, and she would not fail in her duty.

Isabella, to be known in her own time and in centuries to come as one of the greatest rulers Spain had ever seen, was born to John II of Castile and Isabella of Portugal on 22 April 1451. Or so the sources imply, for, at the time, she was considered so inconsequential that the date of her birth and baptism were not even recorded.

She was born into a Spain that was not yet united: Castile and the rest of the Iberian Peninsula were a hotbed of political, religious and social unrest, and the princess – who stood third in line to the throne after the birth of her younger brother, Alfonso – did not have a secure childhood. When her father died in 1454, her elder stepbrother became king as Henry IV: living away from court but under the constant eye of her older brother's men, Isabella, her grief-stricken mother and younger brother were kept out of the public eye, ostensibly for their own good but in reality to keep them away from the intrigue that surrounded the court and the thorny issue of the succession.

In greatly reduced living conditions, it was here that Isabella's life-long piety was first carefully cultivated at the hands of her mother and friends,

The Inquisition was not a new idea – the Medieval Inquisition had taken place in the 13th century the religious conviction that would see her through many a hardship taking root in fertile soil. It was also during these years of hardship that Isabella's already apparent self-control and iron will were carefully honed, standing her in good stead for what was to follow.

Castile under Henry's rule was dangerously unstable: weak, inept and in thrall to his favourites, the king was dethroned in effigy by his nobles in 1465 and Isabella's younger brother declared king. Civil war broke out, and as the kingdom descended further into terror and brutality, Isabella switched allegiance, proclaiming her support for her younger brother. All expectations were that Alfonso would return Castile to its former glory, but hopes were dashed when the young pretender died suddenly in 1468. Amid the official story of plague, rumours of poisoning abounded, and Isabella, named as Alfonso's successor, became the perfect focus for the hopes of the kingdom.

Over the years that followed, she steered a careful course; instead of succumbing to pressure to lead the revolt, she instead remained outwardly agreeable towards her older brother, negotiating expertly to achieve what she wanted. Honing the control and determination that had been instilled in her during her early years, Isabella bided her time, waiting for the moment she would be called to bring her kingdom back to order.

Isabella attracted several suitors over the years, but the one who held her lasting attention was Ferdinand, the second son of John, king of the neighbouring kingdom of Aragon. Similar in age to her, fit, athletic, handsome and witty, the match had first been mooted when Isabella was only six years old. Now, some 12 years later, she negotiated her own marriage under the very nose of her brother, and in flagrant defiance of the king, married Ferdinand in 1469.

With his kingdom in tatters, Henry died in 1474. Finally Isabella got what she had fought for: she took the throne as queen of Castile and Leon on 11 December 1474. Although heralded by many as the saviour of the kingdom, the early years of her reign were far from smooth, rife with rebellions and plots to overthrow her. Although she had not been trained to rule, and was lacking in Latin and other accomplishments deemed necessary for the task, Isabella did not falter; she had been appointed by God, and by God she would rule. Only she could bring religious unity to the divided kingdom. Her entire life she had been waiting for this moment. She would not fail.

There had been Jews in Spain for more than 1,500 years, and in Isabella's time the population stood at about 80,000 Jews to 6 million Christians. The question of the Jewish faith had long been a delicate issue throughout Europe. Expelled from England in 1290 and France just under a century later, the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon had not followed suit, although there had been forced conversions to Christianity twice in relatively recent history. Those who were converted became known as 'conversos'.

There were those, however, who did not think that the conversos were entirely sincere. They had taken advantage of their new position, it was argued, and indeed many reached positions of power and wealth within the kingdom, further fuelling rumours and jealousies. These 'false converts', guilty of judaising - practicing their old religion while professing the new - were seen as a threat to the security of the realm and the very souls of those who lived there.

Although clever in their deception, there were ways to tell if a convert was still secretly holding to Jewish ways. Food, for one, played a big part in determining if someone's conversion was sincere. Not eating pork, rabbit, and birds that had been strangled was a giveaway, as was frying meat in olive oil instead of lard. Cleansing of meat in general, the cutting off of fat and cooking meat in advance so as not to cook on a Saturday was also

Isabella's ring collection

An attractive prospect on the marriage market, Isabella was not lacking in potential suitors

1457 Ferdinand of Aragon

Reason: A negotiation between Henry of Castile and John II of Navarre to show their united front.
Outcome: The arrangement was as fickle as the friendship, and was broken off four years later.

1461 Charles of Viana

Reason: The Castilian king turned to Ferdinand's 40-year-old brother to cement an alliance.
Outcome: John II had his son imprisoned, and the betrothal became moot as Charles died that year.

1464 Edward IV of England

Reason: Another alliance attempt; with the added benefit of removing Isabella from Castile.
Outcome: Edward IV had already fallen in love with, and secretly married, Elizabeth Woodville.

1465 Afonso V of Portugal

Reason: Another strategic attempt to remove Isabella from the line of succession.
Outcome: Diplomatic relations broke down, much to the relief of the less-than-impressed Isabella.

1466 Pedro Giron Pachero

Reason: Master of the Order of Calatrava - he held her brother hostage until the betrothal was agreed.
Outcome: The horrified princess prayed to be delivered; Pedro died on his way to claim her.

1468 Richard of York

Reason: The second most powerful man in England, he was a worthy husband for a princess.
Outcome: An alliance with England was no longer on the cards as relations broke down.

1468 Charles Duke of Berry

Reason: A move towards setting aside the historic bad feeling between Spain and France.
Outcome: The habitual conflict between the two countries soon meant the alliance was set aside.

1469 Afonso V of Portugal

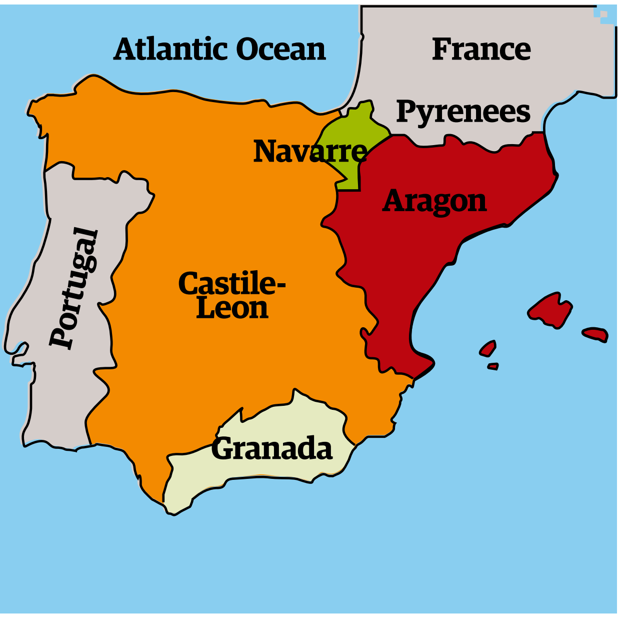
Reason: A final attempt to prevent Isabella from inheriting the throne in Castile.
Outcome: The match was eventually thwarted by Isabella's own actions.

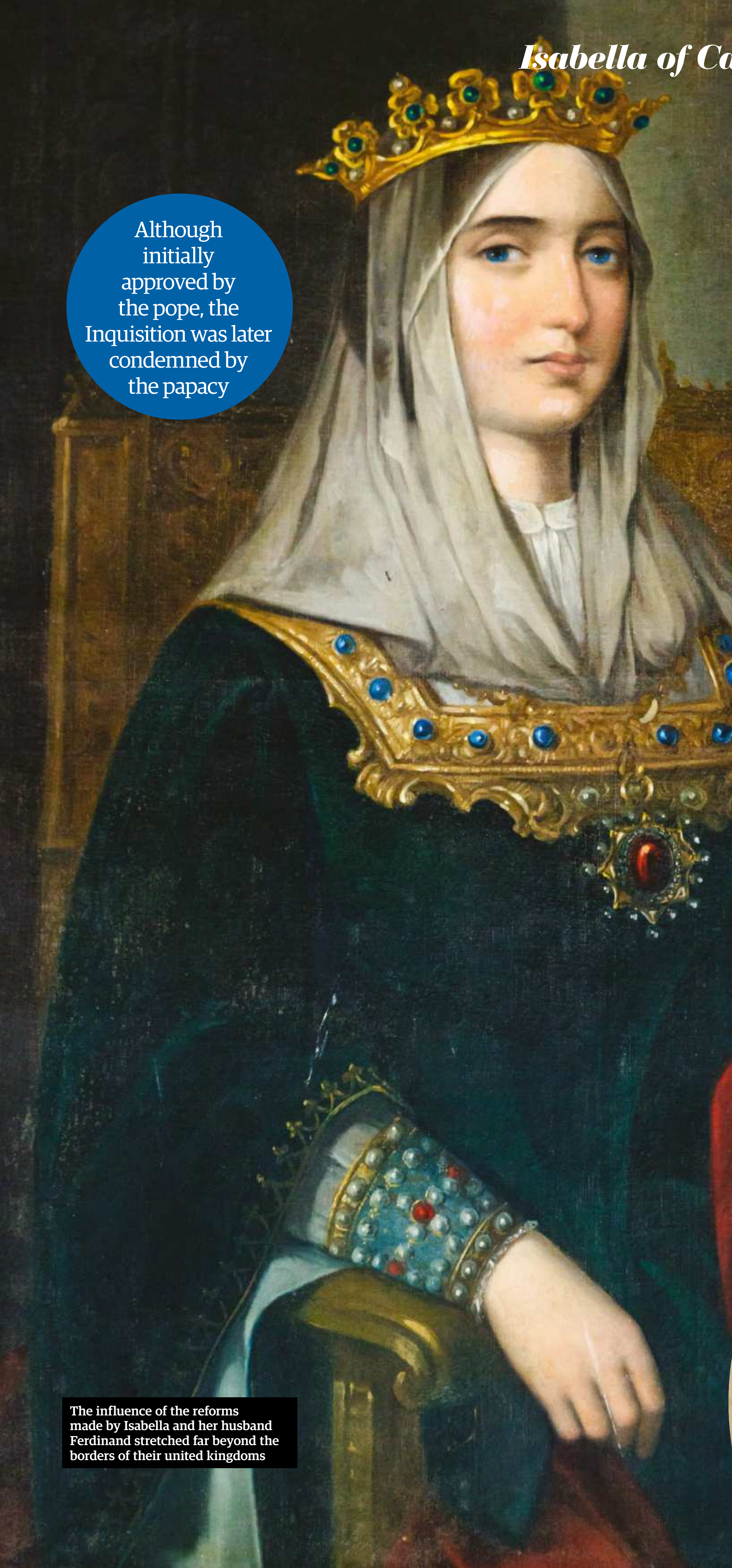
1469 Ferdinand of Aragon

Reason: Isabella never forgot her first betrothal, and entered negotiations on her own behalf.
Outcome: After finally meeting, the smitten Isabella declared she would have no one but Ferdinand.

The Unification of Spain

Until the 15th century, the rulers of Castile and Aragon governed a series of separate distinct kingdoms within the Iberian Peninsula. The marriage of Isabella of Castile to Ferdinand of Aragon in 1469, however, began the gradual process of unification that would lead to the eventual creation of the Spain we know today.


Atlantic Ocean
France
Pyrenees
Navarre
Aragon
Portugal
Castile-Leon
Granada
🟧🟥 United by Ferdinand and Isabella – 1479
▨ Conquered by Spain – 1492
🟩 Acquired by Spain – 1524



Although initially approved by the pope, the Inquisition was later condemned by the papacy

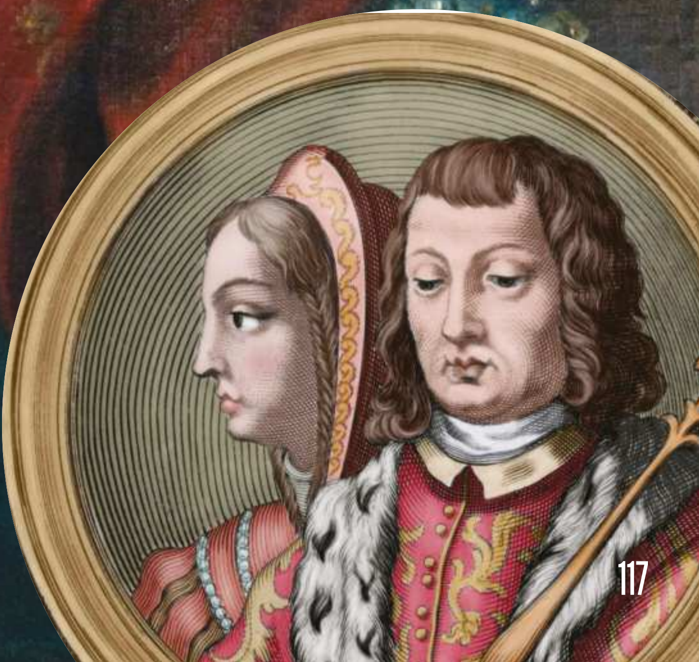
Reforming a kingdom

After inheriting a kingdom in turmoil, Isabella initiated highly effective reform

Law: La Santa Hermandad, or The Holy Brotherhood, was revived, an old system of armed local militias that acted as a citizen police force. Accountable to the queen, they tracked and captured criminals, as well as helping to establish and maintain order. The Hermandad were highly efficient, with a success rate close to 100 per cent. Isabella also personally oversaw the appointment of judges, and the entire judicial system grew more efficient due to regular checks and officials being held to account.

Finance: Currency throughout the kingdom was in a poor state, with coinage debased and inflation driving the population to financial ruin. Isabella reduced the number of royal mints to combat this problem and took control of currency production, restoring the value of Castilian coin. The previous reigns had left the royal coffers devastatingly depleted, especially due to the injudicious selling off of Crown lands. This was halted and reversed under Isabella, with lands either given or sold back to the Crown.

Government: The reform of the royal council was high on Isabella's list of priorities, and she eradicated the dominance of the nobility by restructuring the composition of the council to consist of nine lawyers and only three nobles. She also recognised the importance of personal contact with her subjects, and ensured that there was ample opportunity for people to air their grievances in her presence. The council of state found itself reformed, new councils were established and the entirety of the governmental machine was streamlined in order to maximise efficiency.



The influence of the reforms made by Isabella and her husband Ferdinand stretched far beyond the borders of their united kingdoms used as evidence against supposedly converted 'new' Christians. Avoiding baptising their children and denying that Jesus had been the Messiah were among other ways of identifying a secret Jew.

The matter was further complicated as there were varying degrees of non-adherence. Some conversos were deeply against the tenets of the Catholic Church, maintaining as many elements of their old faith as they could get away with. Others adopted a mixed approach, mingling Jewish practice with Christian in a hybrid religion that differed from family to family.

One thing was certain, it would no longer be tolerated. Heresy was not something the new queen could afford to ignore: not only the souls of her people but also her own would be in peril, and must be saved at all costs.

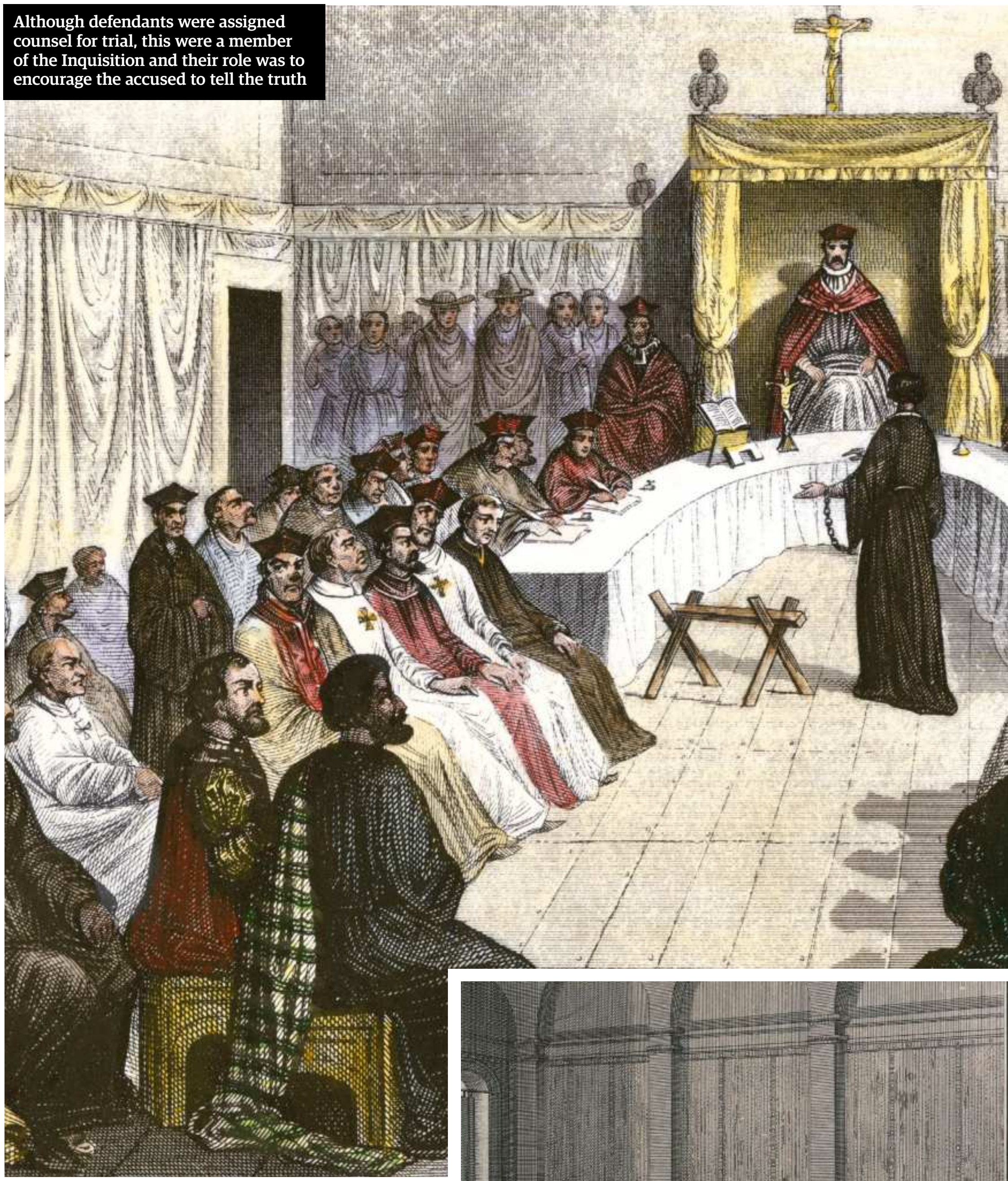
It is often said that a visit to Seville in 1477 first stirred Isabella's interest in adopting an inquisition – or investigation – into the religious state of her kingdom. Receiving firsthand reports of false converts within the city would have alarmed the devout queen greatly; the threat they posed to the religious unity and wellbeing of her kingdom would have been a very real concern.

There were those who advocated an aggressive approach from the start, but it seems Isabella was not initially inclined to follow such a course. Despite a Papal Bull granted in 1478 by Pope Sixtus IV giving permission to establish the Inquisition within Castile, Isabella was in no hurry to put it into practice. Ignoring the advocates of a high-handed approach, Isabella instead concentrated attention on religious education, or rather the lack of it; certain that poor training was the reason conversos were failing to follow their new faith, she embarked upon a programme of education to establish the religious conformity essential for the security of her reign.

Two men greatly trusted by Isabella – Cardinal Mendoza and her confessor, the eventual Archbishop of Granada, Hernando de Talavera – were entrusted with this vital task. Arriving in Seville, they set to work, organising priests into enlightening the misguided conversos. They did not make much headway, however, and it soon became clear that they could do little to penetrate the religious ignorance that plagued the town.

For two years attempts were continued, with little success. Despite her own reservations, there were those close to Isabella who continued to advocate the introduction of an inquisition. Even her husband Ferdinand, ever the pragmatist, was all for it; if nothing else, it would prove a good way of inflating the royal coffers through the confiscation of converso property. With a heavy heart and steely resolve, Isabella had to concede that her attempts to bring religious conformity and peace to her realm had failed. By a royal decree of 27 September 1480, the Spanish Inquisition – or The Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition – was unleashed upon Castile.

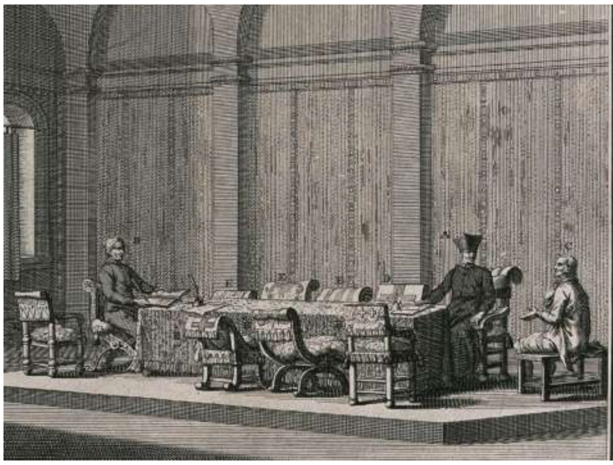
Isabella's initial aim was simple: root out the false converts among the converso population and



Although defendants were assigned counsel for trial, this were a member of the Inquisition and their role was to encourage the accused to tell the truth

How it worked

What happened for a suspect to go from being accused to convicted, and what outcome could they hope for?



Denouncement

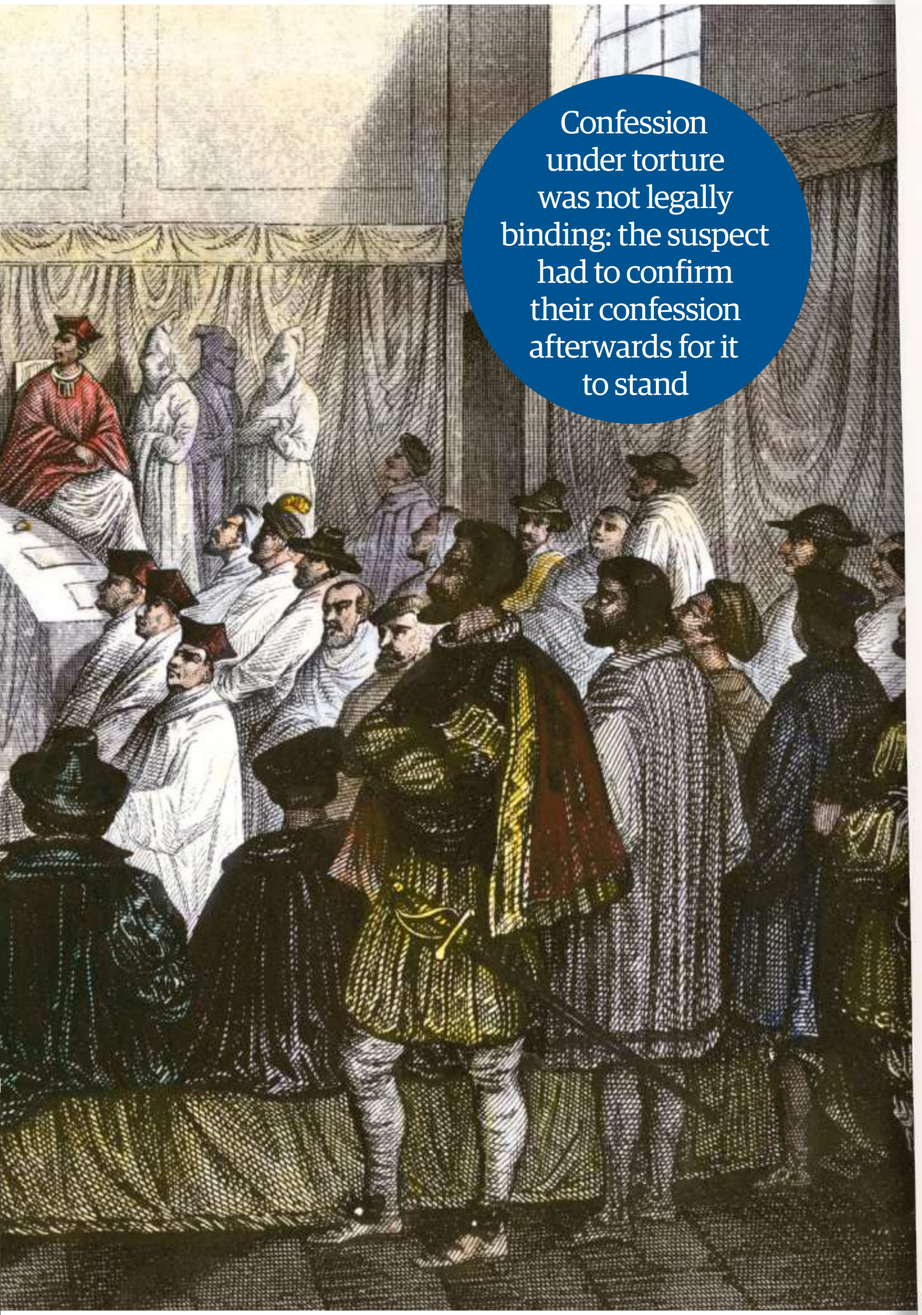
With the offer of grace if confession was made within a certain amount of time, people were encouraged to come forward to confess their sins and to name others in the process.

Detention

The suspect was relieved of their property and imprisoned, their family left in financial ruin. The process was secret; the accused was not informed of the nature of the accusations against them.

Trial

The defendant testified, and those who denounced them did likewise. Finding witnesses to absolve them or to prove that their accusers were untrustworthy were a suspect's only means of defence.



Confession under torture was not legally binding: the suspect had to confirm their confession afterwards for it to stand

The Spanish Inquisition is hiring

Looking for a career change? Want to be part of the most ruthless organisation known to Christian Europe? Look no further for exciting new opportunities

Employment opportunities

Grand Inquisitor

Description: Overseeing the Inquisition and rooting out insincere converts to Catholicism, you will aid and encourage the expansion of the Inquisition throughout Spain and beyond. In this vital role, you will also preside over the Council of the Supreme and General Inquisition.

Skills required: Good leadership, dedication to returning Spain to Christianity, willing to stay in post for several years. Thick skin.

Inquisitor

Description: Answerable to the Grand Inquisitor. Pay: 60,000 maravedies, to rise as the century progresses. A frontline position, you will spend a good deal of time deliberating verdicts and collecting evidence in the quest to eradicate heresy from Spain.

Skills required: No theological training necessary, but must be well-versed in the law: university law degree or current position as a tax collector considered a distinct advantage.

Calificador

Description: In this role you will weigh the merits of cases brought before the tribunal. Listening to evidence and deciding if heresy has been committed and arrest warranted will also be within your remit.

Skills required: A theological background is customary for this role, along with good listening and decision-making skills.

Alguacil (Bailiff)

Description: You will be responsible for the arrest and jailing of suspects, along with taking possession of their goods. In this role you will also be expected to implement creative ways of extracting a confession, and be prepared to do whatever it takes.

Skills required: Perseverance and determination are essential to success in this post. A strong stomach and lack of emotion also a bonus.

Fiscal (Prosecutor)

Description: A job right at the heart of the Inquisition: presenting accusations, investigating rumours and getting the truth out of witnesses, there is never a boring moment in this role. Excellent promotion prospects to Inquisitor.

Skills required: Ability to drive the prosecution process. You will also be expected to perform mental and physical torture when required.

Notary of Property

Description: You will be responsible for registering the goods of the accused upon their detention, noting in detail both what they have with them and what other property they have to their name.

Skills required: Good record-keeping skills, the ability to tell if property is of worth, neat handwriting preferable.

Notary of the Secret

Description: Required to record the testimony of accused and witnesses, you will be present during interrogations to make a detailed record of all that occurs. A permanent position, it comes with the rare benefits of access to the Inquisitorial archives and security of tenure.

Skills required: Attention to detail, ability to write fast and clearly, good memory and organisational skills are all essential to succeed in this post.

Familiar

Description: A lay position, the successful candidate will become an honoured servant of the Inquisition. Particularly suited to members of the nobility or those after a title, benefits include being permitted to carry arms in order to protect Inquisitors and, of course, yourself.

Skills required: Must be ready to do your duty at all times. Inclination towards informing not essential but advantageous.

Voluntary confession

This was the safest bet; confessing freely could mean staying alive, and offered a reduced punishment compared to keeping quiet, although that was by no means guaranteed.

Torture

This was to force a confession and not to cause pain per se, but that was little comfort to the accused, especially as no exception was made for age, sex or infirmity.

Acquittal

Unusual, but not unheard of, the suspect could be acquitted of the charges made against them, leading to their release.

Suspended

In this instance, the trial was suspended, with the suspect either being released or held in prison until such time that the proceedings recommenced.

Reconciled

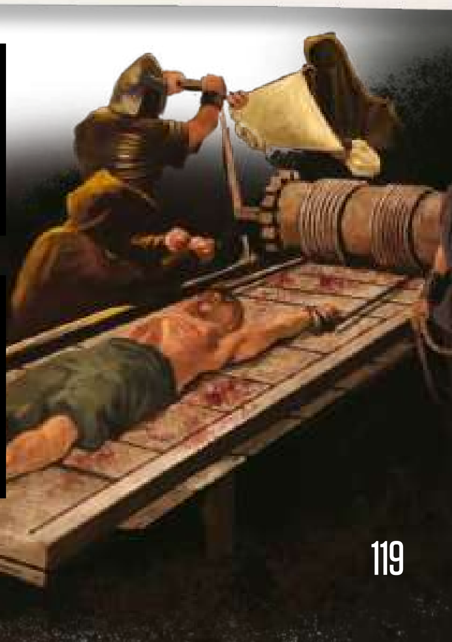
A public ceremony took place where the accused received letters patent to allow them back into the life of the church. Punishment was severe, including confiscation of property and whipping.

Penanced

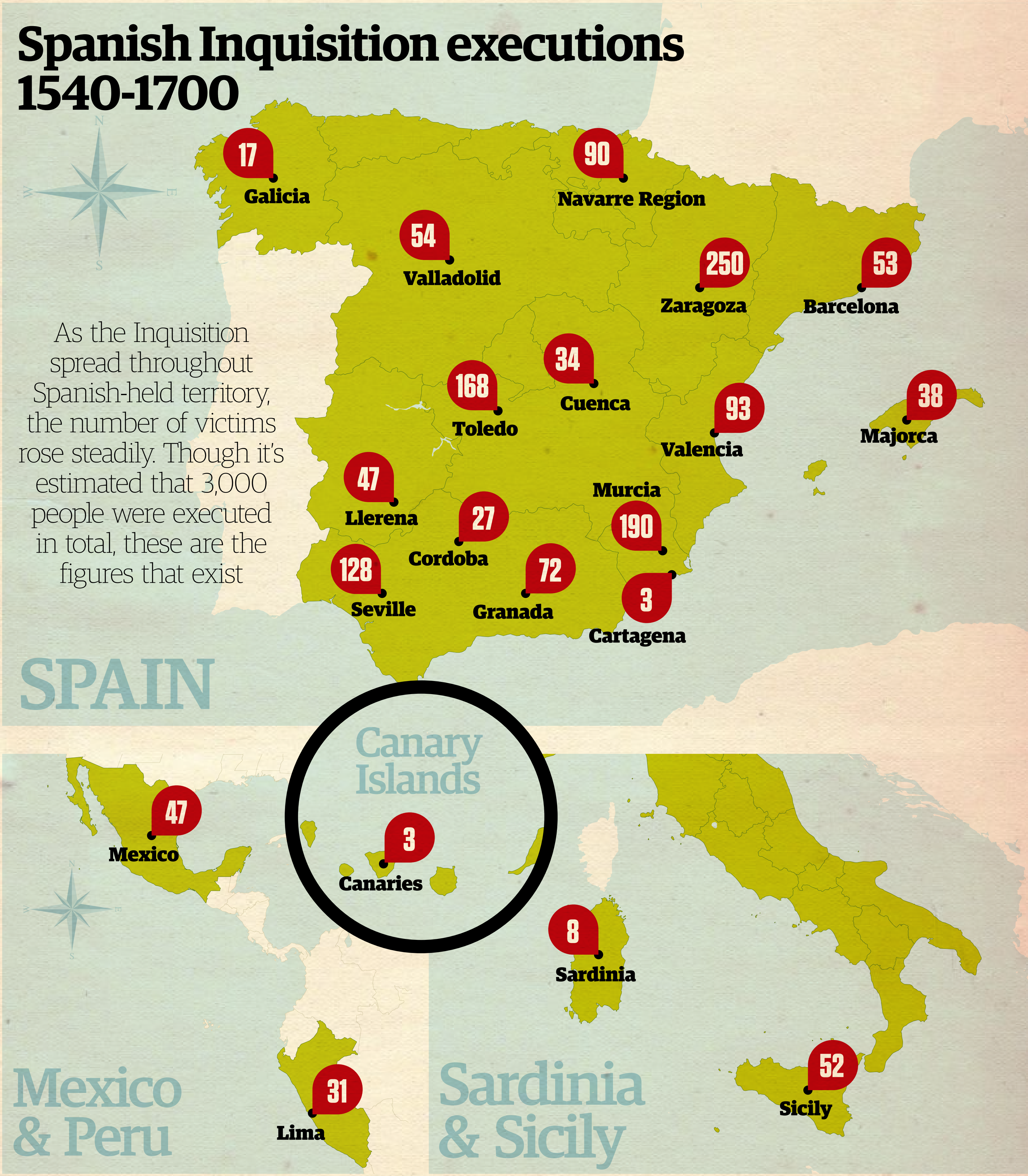
The suspect, considered guilty of judaising, was required to show their repentance for their sin. This could be anything from a fine to lifetime imprisonment in a convent.

Relaxation

The end of the road: used for those who remained impenitent, the suspect was handed over to the secular forces to face the flames. If repentance was shown, the condemned would be strangled before being burned.



Spanish Inquisition executions 1540-1700



As the Inquisition spread throughout Spanish-held territory, the number of victims rose steadily. Though it's estimated that 3,000 people were executed in total, these are the figures that exist

17
Galicia
90
Navarre Region
54
Valladolid
250
Zaragoza
53
Barcelona
34
Cuenca
168
Toledo
93
Valencia
38
Majorca
47
Llerena
Murcia
190
27
Cordoba
128
Seville
72
Granada
3
Cartagena
SPAIN
Canary Islands
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Lima
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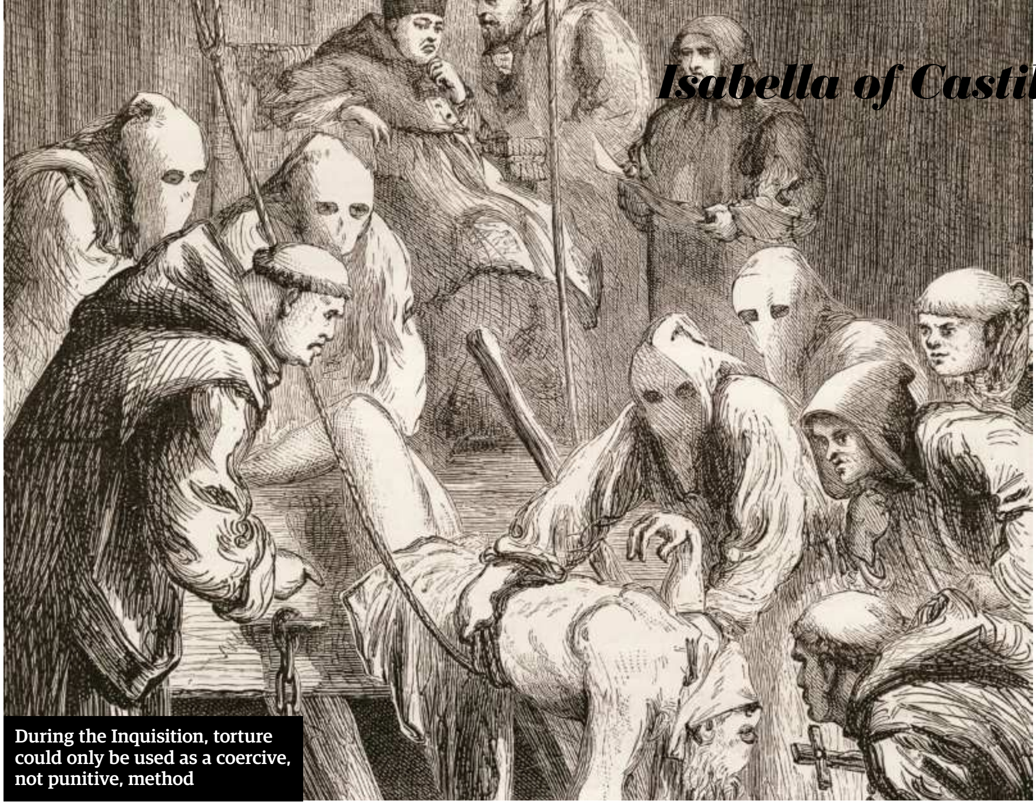
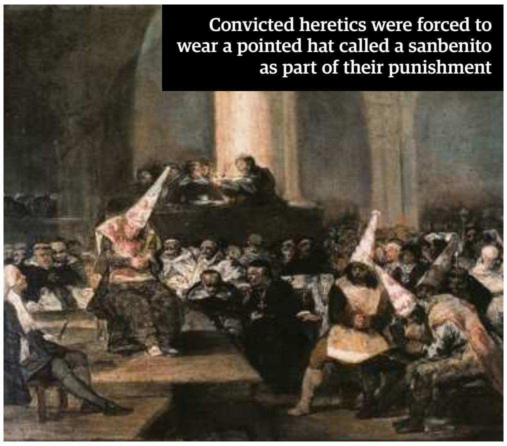


During the Inquisition, torture could only be used as a coercive, not punitive, method



Convicted heretics were forced to wear a pointed hat called a sanbenito as part of their punishment

get rid of the heretics jeopardising her beloved kingdom. Although popularised in Spain, it was not an entirely novel idea, and the new inquisition was modelled closely on the older Medieval Inquisition. Under Isabella and Ferdinand, however, the inquisitorial method was given new life, fuelled by Isabella's conviction that religious unity must be achieved whatever the cost.

Despite the reputation the Spanish Inquisition would later gain, initially it was not entirely unpopular. On the contrary, at a time when the kingdom had been almost torn apart by the instability of civil war, to some it was a relief to see the proof of firm control being established by the new reign of Isabella. This relief, however, proved premature: the people of the kingdom of Castile would live to regret the day the Inquisition was established within their cities.

The Inquisitors, with their distinctive white robes and black hoods, struck first at that well-known hotbed of converso laxity: Seville. At their arrival, mass panic ensued among the converso community, with about 4,000 people fleeing the city. They were right to be afraid. Retribution was swift. Moves were taken to track down those who had fled, while the nobility, under threat of excommunication, informed against those whose whereabouts were known to them.

The Inquisition was not finally abolished in Spain until 1834 in the reign of Isabella II

The first public execution took place in Seville on 6 February 1481. During the spectacle of the auto-da-fé, six people were burned, a terrifying declaration of the might of the Inquisition and the intention of the monarchy behind it.

With that, the Inquisition spread steadily through Spain, with tribunals set up in Cordoba, Jaen and the religious capital of Toledo by 1485. A set pattern to proceedings was quickly established: first, the people of a town were prepared – the fear of God, and by extension the Inquisition – preached from the pulpit for all to hear. Matters officially began with the arrival of the Inquisitors, when the Edict of Grace – a call to come forward and confess – would be read out, and a span of time given to the people of the town to respond. If they confessed their sins and admitted their Judaism, they could hope for redemption. If not, they should expect the full wrath of the Inquisition to fall upon them.

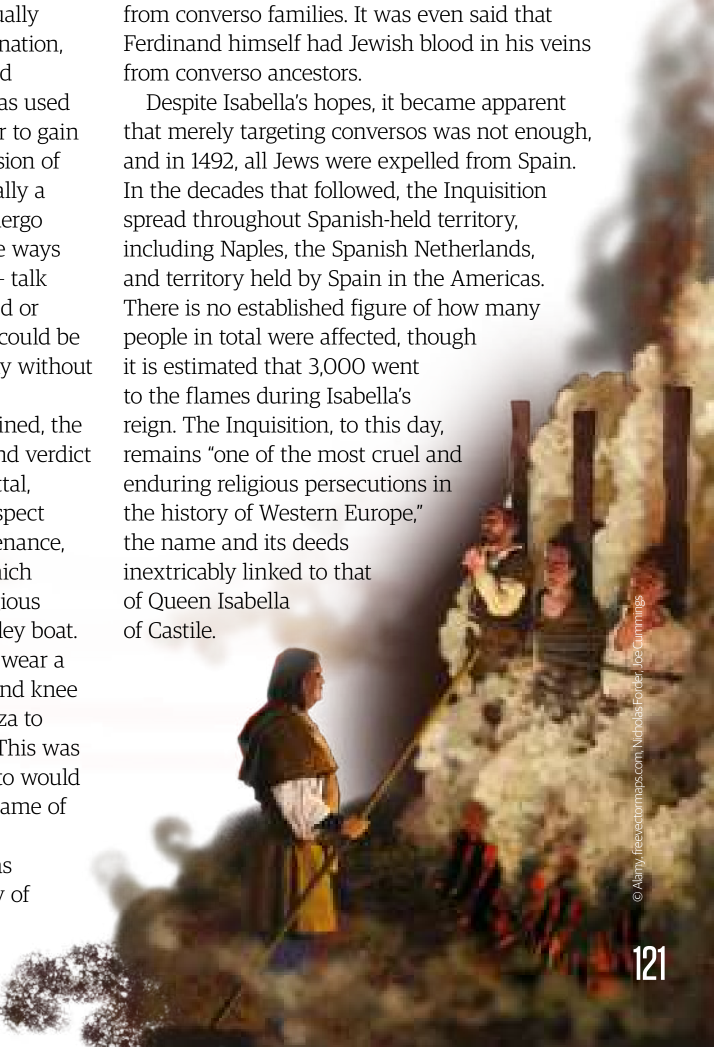
Once a suspect was in custody, the primary aim was to extract a confession. If a person spoke freely, then all to the good. If not, there were several ways of gaining the information required. Torture and the Spanish Inquisition have become virtually synonymous in the popular imagination, and for good reason: a standard 15th-century approach, it was used by the Inquisition in order to gain the all-important admission of guilt. Although technically a suspect could only undergo torture once, there were ways around this restriction – talk of a session being paused or suspended meant that it could be continued the following day without strictly breaking the rules.

Once confession had been obtained, the details of the case were then examined, and verdict and sentence, if necessary, decided. Acquittal, though rare, could sometimes occur. A suspect could likewise be sentenced to perform penance, or the harsher verdict of reconciliation, which could mean indefinite imprisonment, religious incarceration, flogging, or serving on a galley boat. Those who were reconciled were made to wear a yellow gown called a sanbenito, woollen and knee length, and a tall, conical hat called a coroza to advertise to people that they had sinned. This was not even forgotten on death – the sanbenito would be on display in the local church to the shame of the family left behind.

What made the Inquisition so feared was the fact that it thrived on that most deadly of weapons: anonymous accusations. Not only that, but once a confession was made, a suspect was required to name others who had also lapsed, thus giving the Inquisition a steady stream of victims. Refusing or failing to alert the authorities as to the identity or whereabouts of a heretic could also lead to arrest and execution.

Although permission and blessing were initially granted by the pope, the Inquisition was financed and organised by Isabella and Ferdinand themselves. Whether Isabella personally attended an execution ordered by the Inquisition is unknown, but it is undeniable that she knew, and approved of, the methods used by the Inquisitorial machine. Despite this, many of her closest and most trusted advisers had converted from the Jewish faith, with three secretaries that served the monarchs being from converso families. It was even said that Ferdinand himself had Jewish blood in his veins from converso ancestors.

Despite Isabella's hopes, it became apparent that merely targeting conversos was not enough, and in 1492, all Jews were expelled from Spain. In the decades that followed, the Inquisition spread throughout Spanish-held territory, including Naples, the Spanish Netherlands, and territory held by Spain in the Americas. There is no established figure of how many people in total were affected, though it is estimated that 3,000 went to the flames during Isabella's reign. The Inquisition, to this day, remains "one of the most cruel and enduring religious persecutions in the history of Western Europe," the name and its deeds inextricably linked to that of Queen Isabella of Castile.



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LIFE, DEATH & GATEWAY TO MODERNITY

Life in the Middle Ages could be harsh, but it laid the groundwork for the modern era

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The societal system that defined life in the Medieval period

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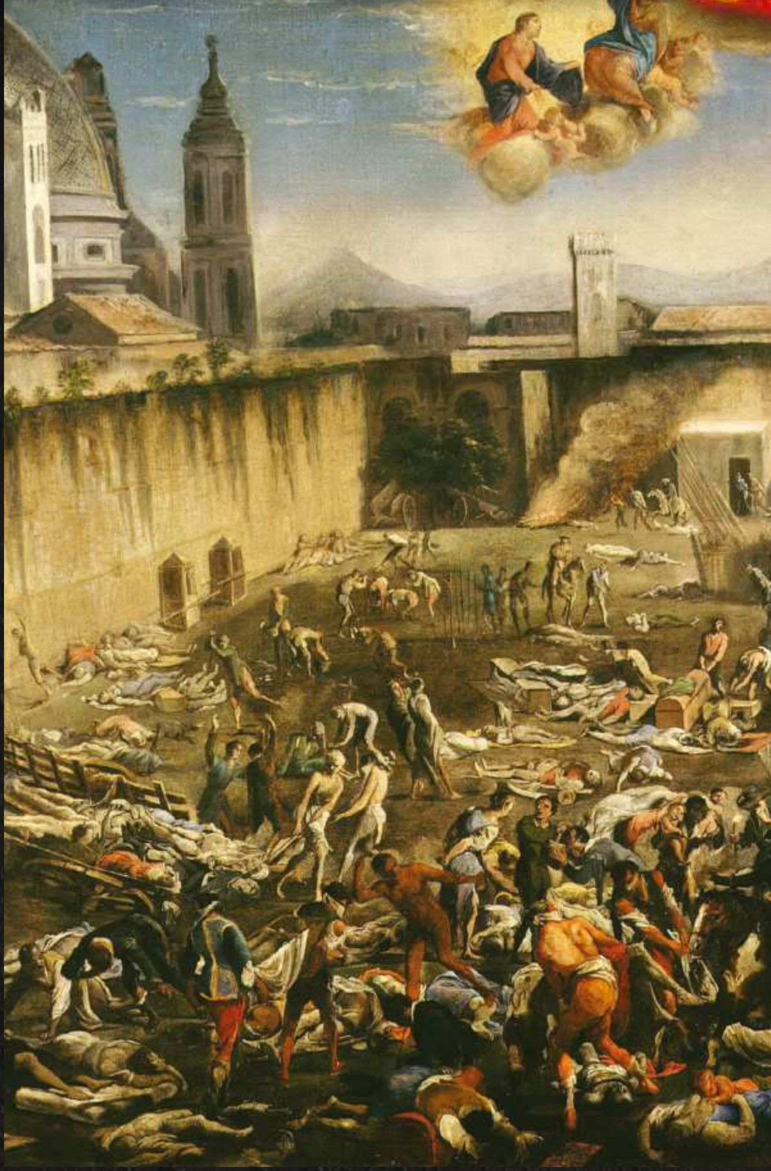

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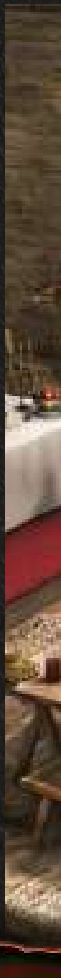

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12 Medieval #Trends

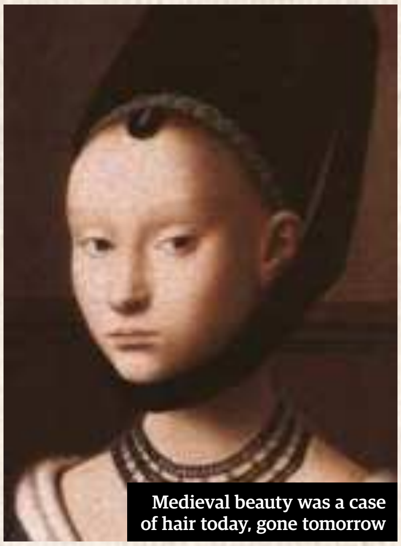
From pigs on trial to hairless faces, discover what went viral in the Middle Ages

Every age has a tendency to look back at older generations and judge the customs, beliefs and traditions of the time. However, it is fair to say that there are few periods in history that we regard as strangely as we do the Middle Ages. They sometimes lack the mystic appeal of Ancient Egypt, the beauty of the Renaissance or the Elizabethan age's excitement and adventure. The Middle Ages have been stamped an unlucky time to be born and popular consensus is that people were poor, food was dull, everything was dirty, and for the vast majority of the time the population were dropping like flies. What we don't hear about is that people created some of the most peculiar, hilarious and astounding trends in human history. It's time to embrace the Medieval period and all of its lovable eccentricities.

Hairless faces

LOCATION: WESTERN EUROPE

While today many women spend money to accentuate their lashes, it was completely different in the Middle Ages. Because the forehead was seen as the central point of their faces, women would remove their eyelashes and eyebrows in order to accentuate it. Some were so committed, they would pluck their hairlines to achieve a perfectly oval, bald face.

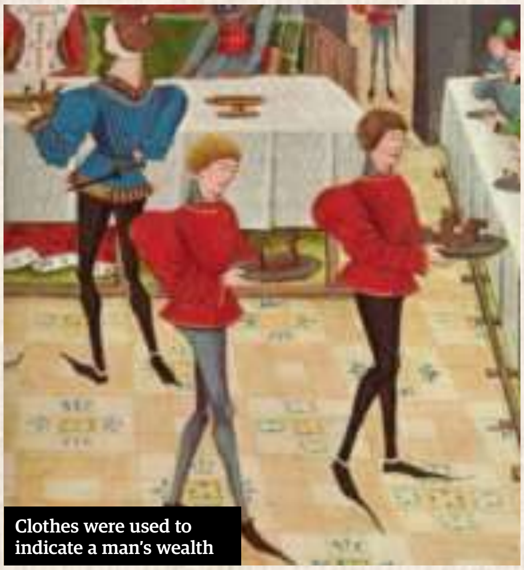


Medieval beauty was a case of hair today, gone tomorrow

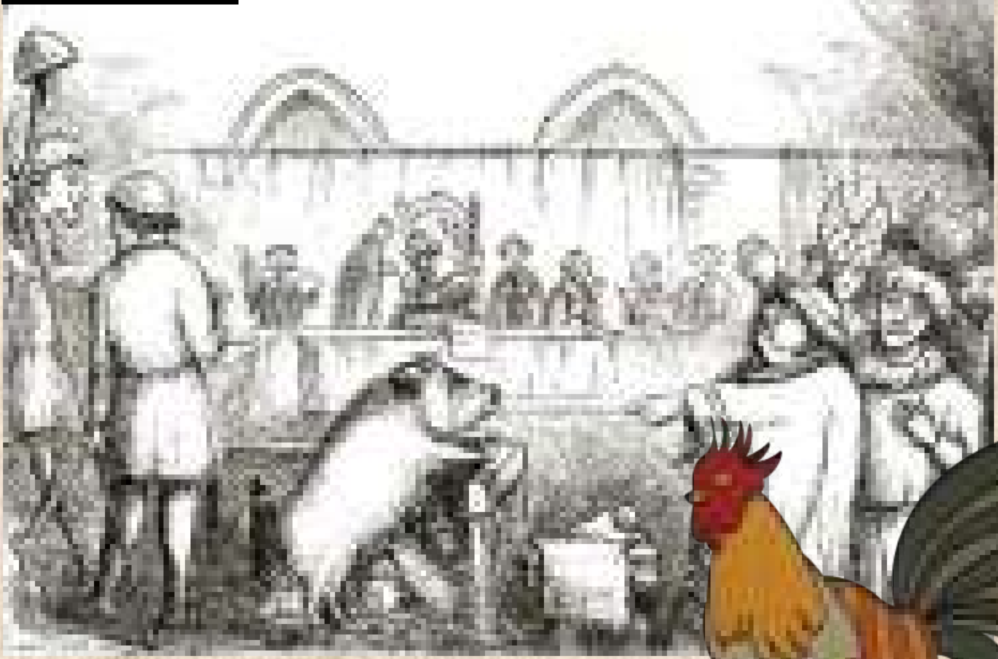
Men's fashion

LOCATION: EUROPE

Clothes were hugely important to the Medieval elite, as they were a way of displaying their wealth and overall superiority over the poor. Because of this, various unusual fashion trends swept through Europe, such as long, pointed shoes for men. The longer the shoes, the greater the wealth of the wearer and hence their social rank. Some of the shoes were so long they had to be reinforced with whalebone. Late 14th century men were keen to show off their bodies in saucy and revealing clothing, and would wear dangerously short tunics with tights. This trend was followed by the codpiece – a pouch attached to the front of men's trousers, shaped and padded to emphasise their masculinity.


Clothes were used to indicate a man's wealth

These shoes were the sole of medieval fashion

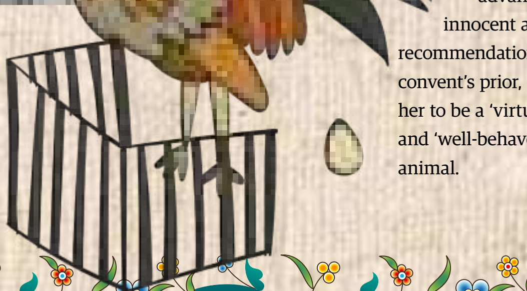

Pigs would often find themselves on trial

Animal court

LOCATION: ALL OVER EUROPE

Life in Medieval times could be tough, and this didn't just apply to humans. Just like their two-legged owners, all manner of animals, from livestock to insects, were put on trial if suspected of breaking the law. There are records of at least 85 animal trials that took place during the Middle Ages and the tales vary from the tragic to the absurd. By far the most serial offenders were pigs, accused and convicted of chewing off body parts and even eating children. Most were found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging or being burned at the stake. In 1386, a convicted pig was dressed in a waistcoat, gloves, drawers and a human mask for its execution. It wasn't just pigs that felt the sting of the law, though. In 1474 a court found a rooster guilty of the 'unnatural crime' of laying an egg; unwanted rats often found themselves on the receiving end of a strongly worded letter asking them to leave the premises, and curiously enough, there was a trial of dolphins in Marseilles in 1596. However, not all of the trials ended in brutality. One donkey, which found herself the victim of unwanted sexual advances, was proclaimed innocent after a strong recommendation from a convent's prior, declaring her to be a 'virtuous' and 'well-behaved' animal.

> "A court found a rooster guilty of the 'unnatural crime' of laying an egg"



It's marriage, but not as we know it

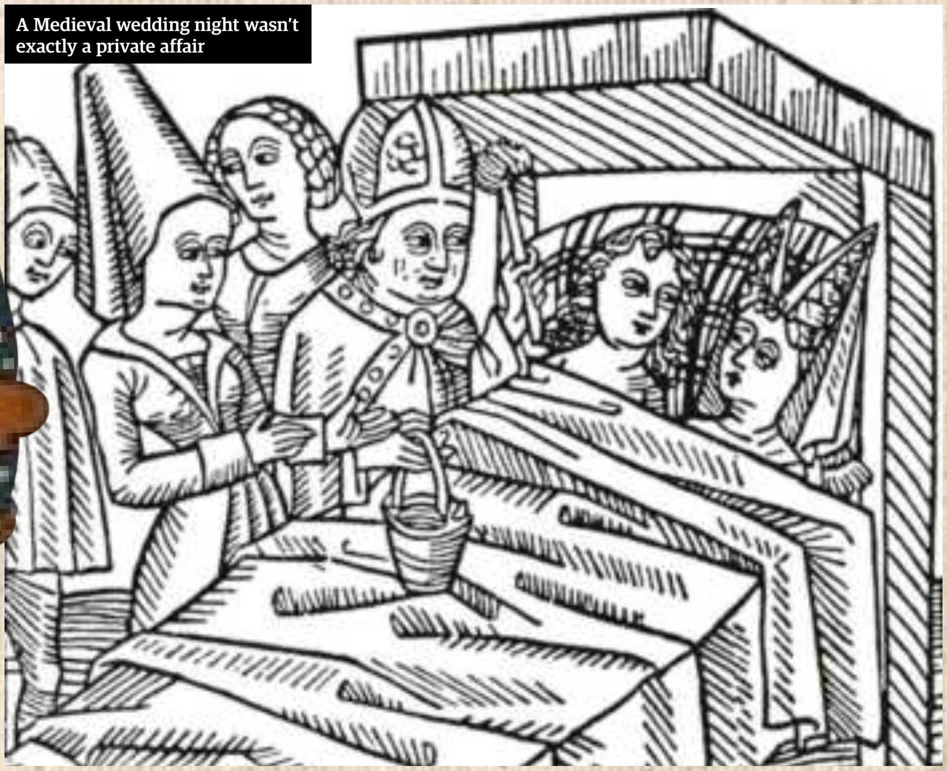
LOCATION: WESTERN EUROPE

Much of what people assume about Medieval upper-class marriage is true - it was rarely for love, but rather for political and social gain, and women, as in almost all aspects of Medieval life, had no say. In fact, men and women were judged as 'ready' for marriage as soon as their bodies reached puberty, as young as 12 for girls and 14 for boys.

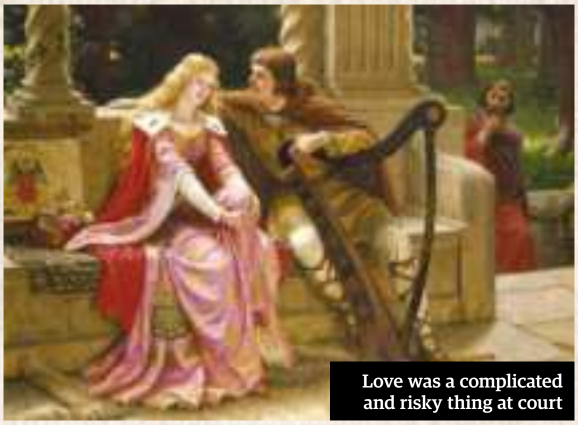
However the marriage ceremony as we know it today was very different. For a start there wasn't a formal ceremony until much later, and couples didn't need permission to marry. They could do it in a matter of moments by uttering consent, which led to marriages in the street, down the pub or even in bed. This meant it became rather hard to prove people were actually married, so in the 12th century it was declared a holy sacrament that must be observed by God.

It wasn't just the marriage that was being observed. The consummation, especially among upper-class newlyweds, was far from private. It wasn't unusual for the bride to be carried to the bed by her family. The 'act of bedding' was not regarded as an intimate moment, but rather an act of investment in the union, and one that warranted being observed by witnesses. Some couples had their blushes spared by the luxury of a bed curtain, but this was not the case for everyone, and the observers would instead wait around the room for the act to be 'completed'.

> "The 'act of bedding' was not regarded as an intimate moment"



A Medieval wedding night wasn't exactly a private affair



Love was a complicated and risky thing at court

Courtly love

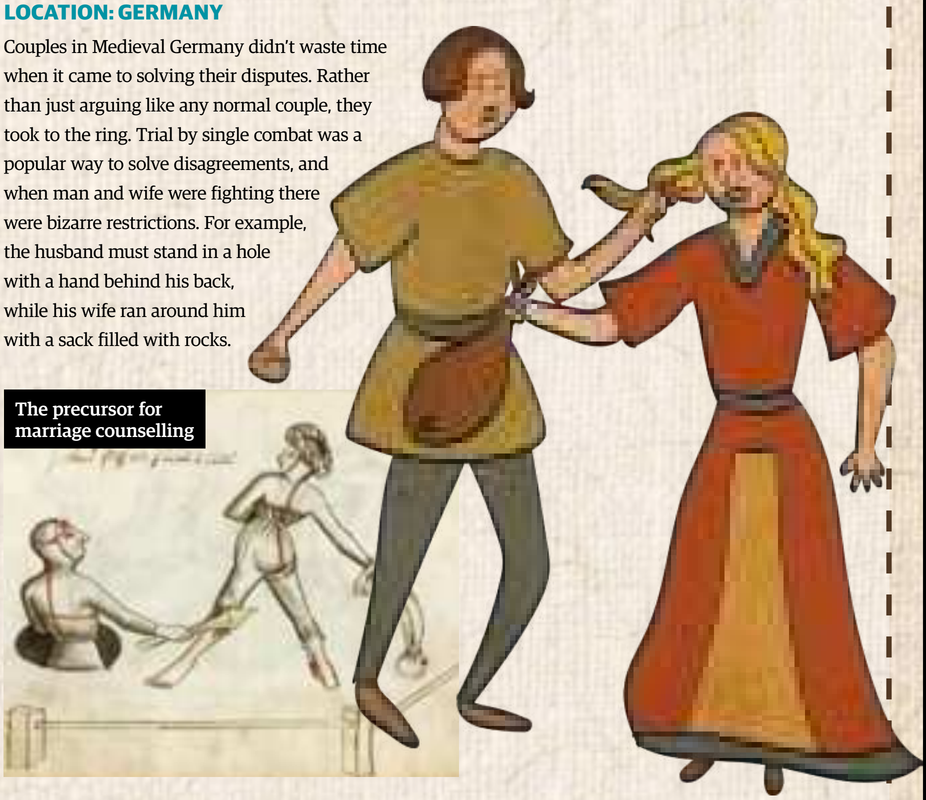
LOCATION: FRANCE

As mentioned, most upper-class Medieval marriages were often loveless husks designed purely for financial and social gains. Therefore, in order to not throw themselves into the nearest bog, Medieval nobles fulfilled their romantic desires in 'courtly love.' Undertaken, not surprisingly, by members of the courts, courtly love allowed lords and ladies to practise the elements of love regardless of their marital status. This involved the risqué actions of dancing, giggling and even holding hands. Sex, however, was strictly forbidden, and reserved for one's spouse only. Courtly love was so popular, a list of rules was written up including: "Marriage is no real excuse for not loving."

Solving marriage disputes

LOCATION: GERMANY

Couples in Medieval Germany didn't waste time when it came to solving their disputes. Rather than just arguing like any normal couple, they took to the ring. Trial by single combat was a popular way to solve disagreements, and when man and wife were fighting there were bizarre restrictions. For example, the husband must stand in a hole with a hand behind his back, while his wife ran around him with a sack filled with rocks.

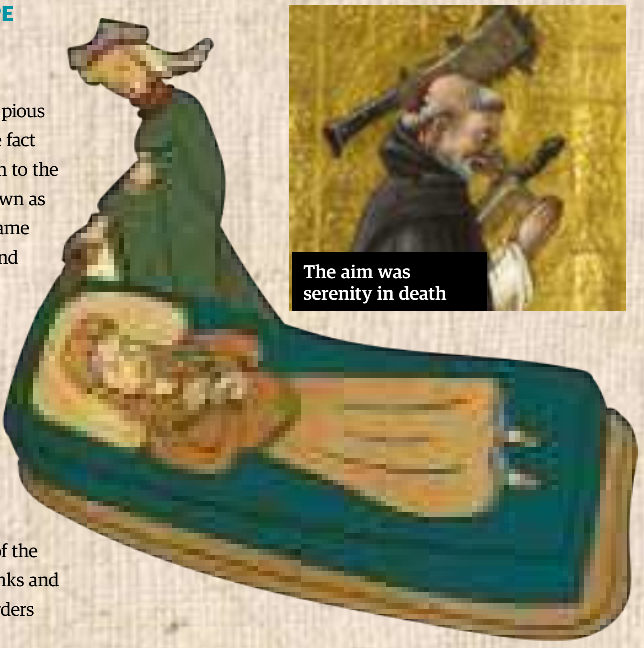


The precursor for marriage counselling

A beautiful death

LOCATION: WESTERN EUROPE

People in Medieval times were very preoccupied with death, which is understandable if you consider how pious society was at the time, and also the fact that many people were falling victim to the Black Death. As a result, a trend known as 'ars moriendi' or 'The art of dying' came into fashion. The idea revolved around dying a good Christian death. This 'good' death should be planned, peaceful. Just to add further stress when you're about to pop your clogs, the dying person should, like Christ, accept their fate without despair, disbelief, impatience, pride or avarice. Dying well was particularly popular with the priesthood, which led to many of the infamous Medieval paintings of monks and holy men accepting their brutal murders with calm serenity.



The aim was serenity in death

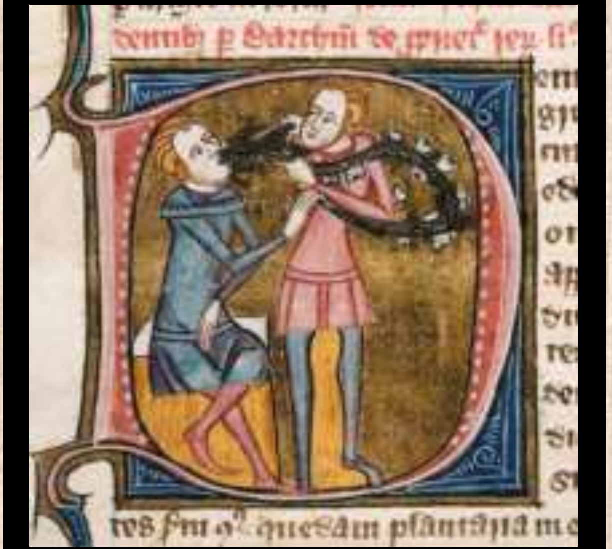
Medieval maladies

Falling ill in the Middle Ages entered you into a very dangerous game of chance

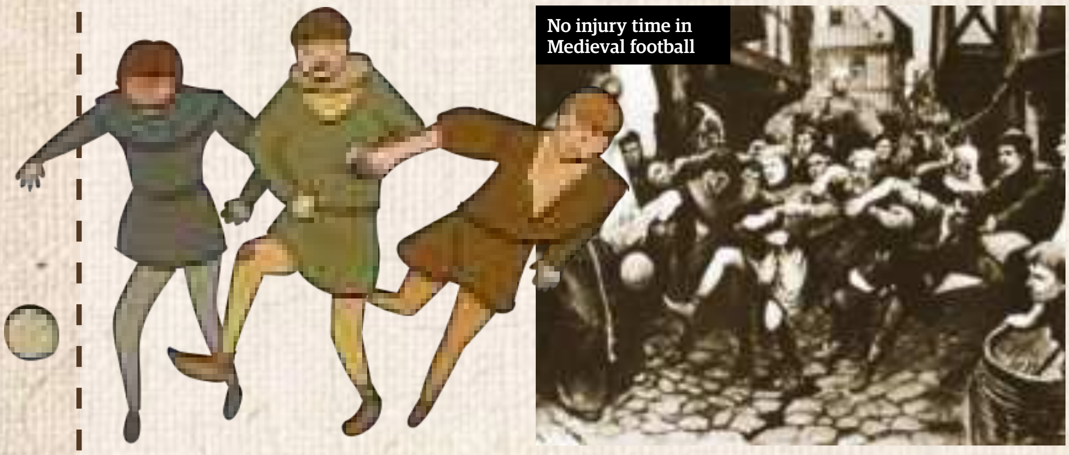
It's safe to say that the Middle Ages weren't the best time to fall ill. It can best be described as an 'experimental' time for medicine, where everything from demons to bad smells were blamed for illness. Some of the remedies used to cure maladies were equally bizarre, including the patient whipping themselves, burning their teeth with a candle for toothache and, of course, a good old-fashioned hazardous pilgrimage. However, whether by sheer luck or actual medical knowledge, some of the unusual remedies actually worked and are, to an extent, still used today.

An example of this is bloodletting, where blood was drawn from a vein by nicking it with a blade, or in certain situations, leeches were applied. Trepanation probably sounds the most brutal of all Medieval remedies, as it involved cutting a hole directly into the human skull to release 'evil spirits'; however trepanning is still used as treatment today – although it's now known as a craniotomy.

But it isn't just the procedures that have now been deemed as suitable. It has also been discovered that many strange medieval herbal concoctions were actually successful such as using onion, which has antibiotic properties, to treat a stye, and bizarrely, snail slime on a burn. This is still utilised today under the innocuous name of 'Snail Gel.'



In order to solve dental woes, people would have to visit the barber, who doubled up as a dentist



No injury time in Medieval football

Football

LOCATION: ENGLAND

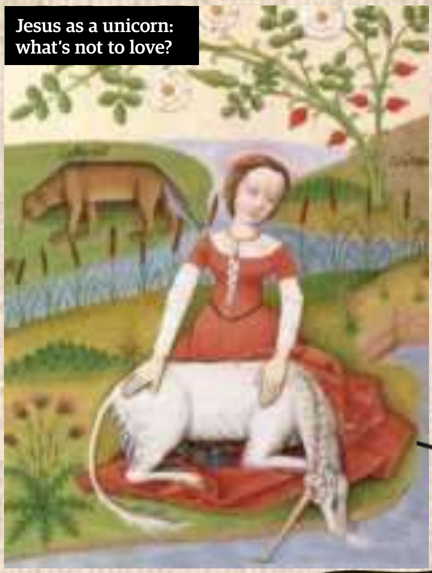
If you thought football hooligans were a modern phenomenon, think again – Medieval England had football-related mob violence before it was even called football. What we regard today as 'football' was violent, chaotic and even deadly. It involved an infinite number of players, could take part across entire villages and often it wasn't the ball being kicked, but the opposing team.

One rule book for 'Shrovetime football' lists that any means could be used to score, apart from actual murder. In 1314 Edward II decided enough was enough and forbade the game, decreeing, "we command and forbid… on pain of imprisonment, such game to be used in the city in future." Clearly he was more of an archery fan.

Jesus the unicorn

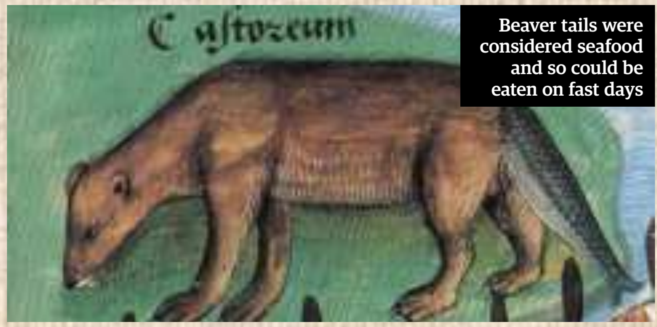
LOCATION: EUROPE

If Medieval people loved two things they were mythology and religion, and these two often combined in a very peculiar way. Due to a mistranslation of what was likely intended to be an ox, it was commonly believed that in the Bible Jesus was likened to a unicorn. Medieval folk ran with this idea and the unicorn, or whatever they believed to be a unicorn, repeatedly cropped up in Medieval religious art. As only innocent maidens were allowed to touch unicorns, the unicorn was also used as a strangely uncomfortable allegory of Christ entering his mother's womb.



Jesus as a unicorn: what's not to love?

> "It was commonly believed that Jesus was likened to a unicorn"

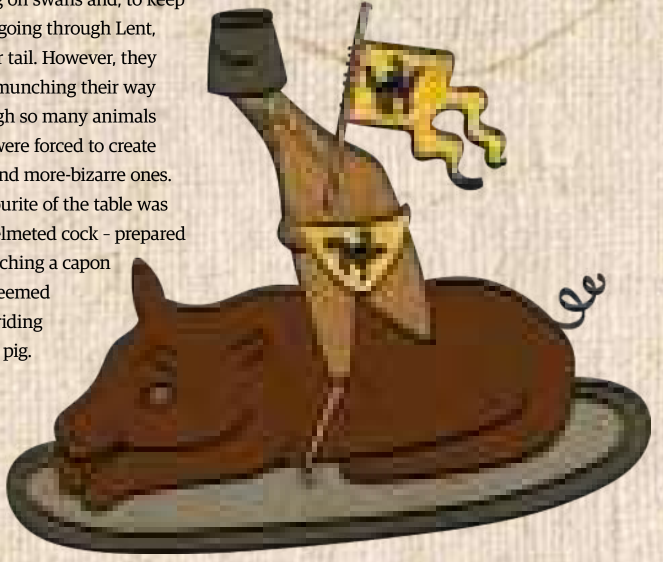


Beaver tails were considered seafood and so could be eaten on fast days

The helmeted cock

LOCATION: EUROPE

If you were a poor person in the Middle Ages, food, for the most part, was dull, boring and repetitive. However, for the rich, nothing was off-limits. They enjoyed dining on swans and, to keep them going through Lent, beaver tail. However, they were munching their way through so many animals they were forced to create new and more-bizarre ones. A favourite of the table was the helmeted cock – prepared by stitching a capon so it seemed to be riding atop a pig.



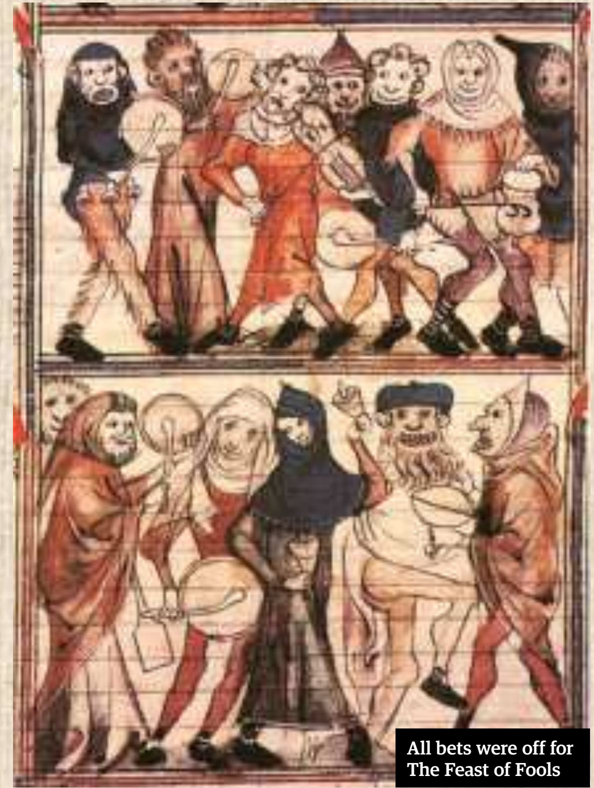
The Feast of Fools

LOCATION: FRANCE ORIGINALLY, BUT LATER ALL OF EUROPE

Starting the year as they meant to go on, many people of Medieval Europe joined together at the beginning of January to celebrate the Feast of Fools. This eclectic event, like most Christian festivals, was inspired by a pagan festival – Saturnalia – and turned the status quo on its head. The highest respected officials swapped with the lowest, serving maids became masters and a king of misrule was crowned.

Although originally intended to be confined only to the hallowed halls of churches, the common people took it upon themselves to celebrate. There were parades, comic performances, costumes, cross-dressing, bawdy songs and, of course, drinking to excess. Not entirely related, but equally as difficult to comprehend, was the Festival of the Ass, where a young girl carrying a child would ride a donkey into church, and throughout the service the congregation replaced 'amen' with a 'hee-haw.'

Considering the celebration was held in super-strict Medieval Christian Europe, it's impressive it survived for so long. However, over time the rules were tightened, certain acts forbidden and the final nail in the coffin of fun came with the Protestant Reformation, which condemned all the enjoyable excesses.



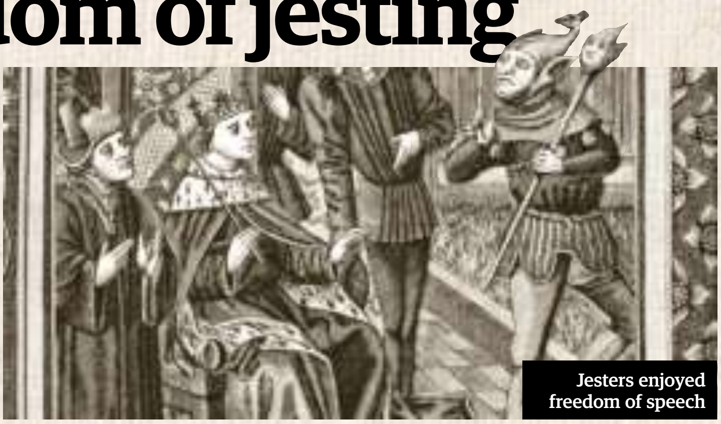
All bets were off for The Feast of Fools

> "Throughout the service the congregation replaced 'amen' with a sombre 'hee-haw'"

The freedom of jesting

LOCATION: WESTERN EUROPE

Being a jester in the Middle Ages may seem a terrible fate, after all their hats were modelled on the ears of an ass; however jesters were granted unique privileges. As everything that came out of their mouths was, by royal decree, to be taken in 'jest', they could get away with slandering the lords and ladies of the court, and voicing their political opinions in a time when doing so was strictly forbidden. Being funny pays, even in the Medieval court.



Jesters enjoyed freedom of speech

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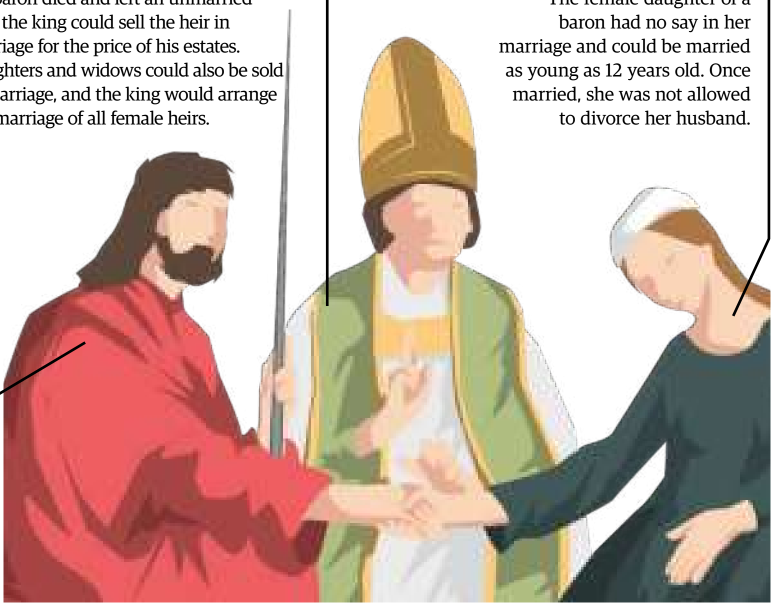
The advent of feudalism

Discover how to rule a united land of loyal followers

When William the Conqueror successfully invaded England and became king in 1066 he completely changed the way the country was run. Before William was crowned the land was divided between earls who were free to govern in whatever way they saw fit, which could result in tyrannical rules and piecemeal laws. Instead, William allocated each section of land to tenants-in-chief known as barons. The baron was still subservient to the king and had to provide him with money and knights when needed. If he was unable to provide these, he would be removed from his position. The system handed more control to the monarch, but keeping so many ambitious and wealthy men in check was a difficult and time-consuming task that could mean the difference between a mighty united nation and a disjointed land ripe for the picking...

Arranging a feudal marriage



Politics not love

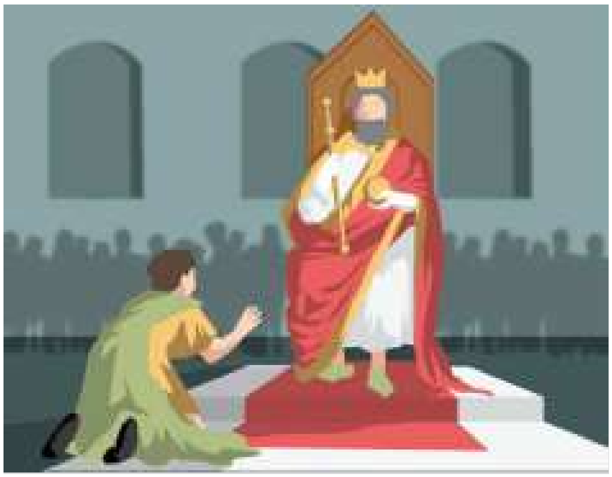
If a baron died and left an unmarried heir, the king could sell the heir in marriage for the price of his estates. Daughters and widows could also be sold in marriage, and the king would arrange the marriage of all female heirs.

Bride

The female daughter of a baron had no say in her marriage and could be married as young as 12 years old. Once married, she was not allowed to divorce her husband.

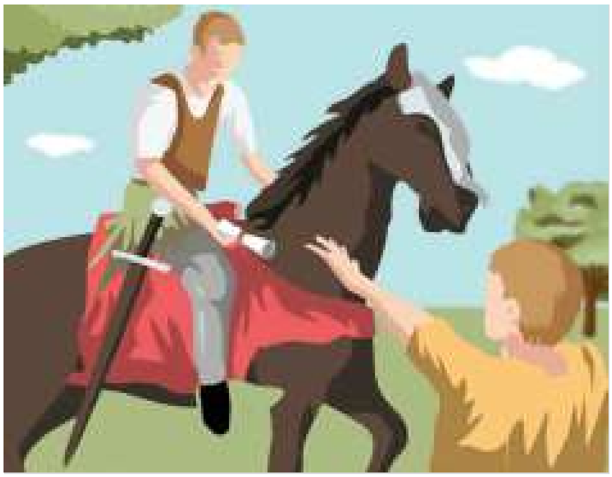
Groom

The aim of marriage was either to further a baron's wealth, land or status, or to end rivalries between families and increase their political influence. The king would sometimes marry his siblings into powerful houses to increase his power.



01 Choose your barons

When William the Conqueror claimed England he picked his barons from his finest warriors. Upon a baron's death their land is passed down to their heir. To ensure their loyalty to you, all barons will need to swear an oath of loyalty before reaping the benefits. The chosen men will kneel before you at a ceremony and proclaim: "Sire, I have become your man."



02 Summon your barons to court

Barons would attend a feudal court, an early incarnation of a parliament. There is no set schedule, so you'll have to send out personal writs to all the barons you wish to appear at your council. The barons will provide you with advice, but it's also an opportunity for you to bring up the tricky subject of funding; after all, ruling a kingdom is expensive.

5 types of royal titles

Duke/Duchess

The highest-ranking peers of the king, they also served as peers of the realm. The first dukes were instated by Edward III.

Marquess/ Marchioness

The marquesses are below the dukes in title, and owned land on the border of the country they were trusted with defending.

Earl

Earls had authority over a region and collected fines and taxes. They were also responsible for leading the king's armies in war.

Viscount/ Vicountess

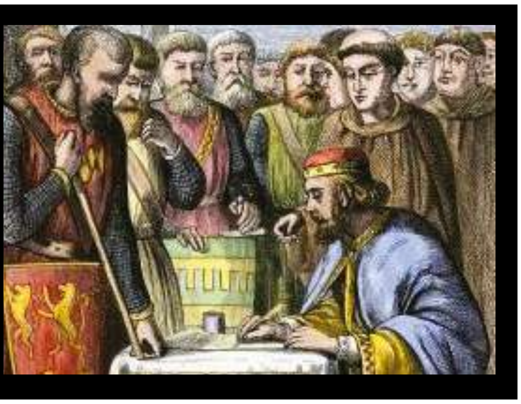
Viscounts would assist with the running of provinces and were heavily involved with administrating the courts.

Knight

Knights were a rung below barons, but were still part of the nobility. They were expected to adhere to a code of chivalry.

How not to... manage your barons

When King John of England suffered a string of defeats overseas he was forced to demand more money from his barons to fund his army. In 1204 John lost his land in Northern France, so in order to recover from this crushing failure he raised taxes without consulting his barons – common practice at the time. However, when John was defeated again at the Battle of Bouvines many English barons lost their possessions in Normandy. On top of this, John returned and demanded yet more money from taxes. This blatant disregard for feudal law was the final straw for the barons, who led a mass rebellion against the king, managing to capture London. By the spring of 1215 John was forced into negotiations with the barons and the end result of this was *Magna Carta* – a document that placed limitations on the king's power and protected some of the barons' rights.



03 Send out a call for arms

As a king you're going to need an ample supply of soldiers to defend your borders and vanquish your enemies. You will have to send out requests to your barons to provide you with knights. Each baron has a different set quota of knights they must supply you with for up to 40 days at a time; make sure their equipment is up to scratch and use them wisely.

04 Collect taxes

Conquering is expensive business, so if your barons are unable to provide knights they need to pay you 'scutage' so you can hire mercenaries instead. You also need to collect the taxes your barons have amassed, as well as the baron's own rent for his land. There is also feudal relief, a one-off tax the heir of an estate pays when a baron dies.

05 Enjoy free lodgings

You will need to travel around the country a lot, so it's just as well that your barons have a duty to provide free food and lodging. Kings tend to travel with quite the entourage, so this can be very costly to the barons; William's household once consumed 6,000 chickens, 1,000 rabbits, 200 geese, 90 boars, 50 peacocks and hundreds of casks of wine during a Christmas visit.

06 Maintain control

The trouble with giving people great expanses of land is that they can become powerful and sometimes rebellious, like the French and German barons who began to govern their lands as independent states. The best way to prevent this is to provide strict but fair leadership. If that fails, you can always relieve the troublemakers of their position (or their life).

4 feudal revolts

Rebellion of György Dózsa

1514, Kingdom of Hungary

Thousands of the gentry were killed and castles burned when peasants in Hungary led a mass revolt against their overlords.

Peasants' Revolt

1381, England

Over a thousand English rebels rose up to protest taxation and unpaid labour, destroying many buildings in London and killing high-ranking officials.

Ivaylo rebellion

1277-1280, Bulgaria

The swineherd Ivaylo led an uprising against Tsar Constantine I, who was overthrown, with Ivaylo put in his place.

Flanders peasant revolt

1323-1328, Flanders

Due to a steep rise in taxes, a series of scattered rural riots broke out and slowly escalated into a five-year rebellion.

Daily life in the Middle Ages

Was it really all work and no play for those who lived in the Medieval era?

As peasants stirred from their slumber in the early hours and headed out at dawn for a hard day toiling the land, nobles would awake in comparative luxury and get stuck into the less back-breaking grind of politics and business. For those at the bottom of Medieval society, it was more a battle for survival. Bound by law, which handed them very few rights, the feudal system ensured the peasants were always at the behest of the ruling class.

It was a hard life. Peasants not only had to labour on the lords' lands but farm the plot loaned to them in order to feed their families. It meant peasants completed the most daunting of tasks, from cutting and collecting wood to threshing and winnowing the grain. They would also work in all weathers and yet they were at least self-sufficient.

Each year was similar. The peasants tended to follow the three-field agricultural system so they would have one plot of land for a summer crop, another for winter and one left fallow so that it could regain nutrients for the following year. They would sow seeds in spring, plough the fallow fields in May, shear sheep in June and July, harvest in August, thresh in September and spend winter producing tools and making repairs.

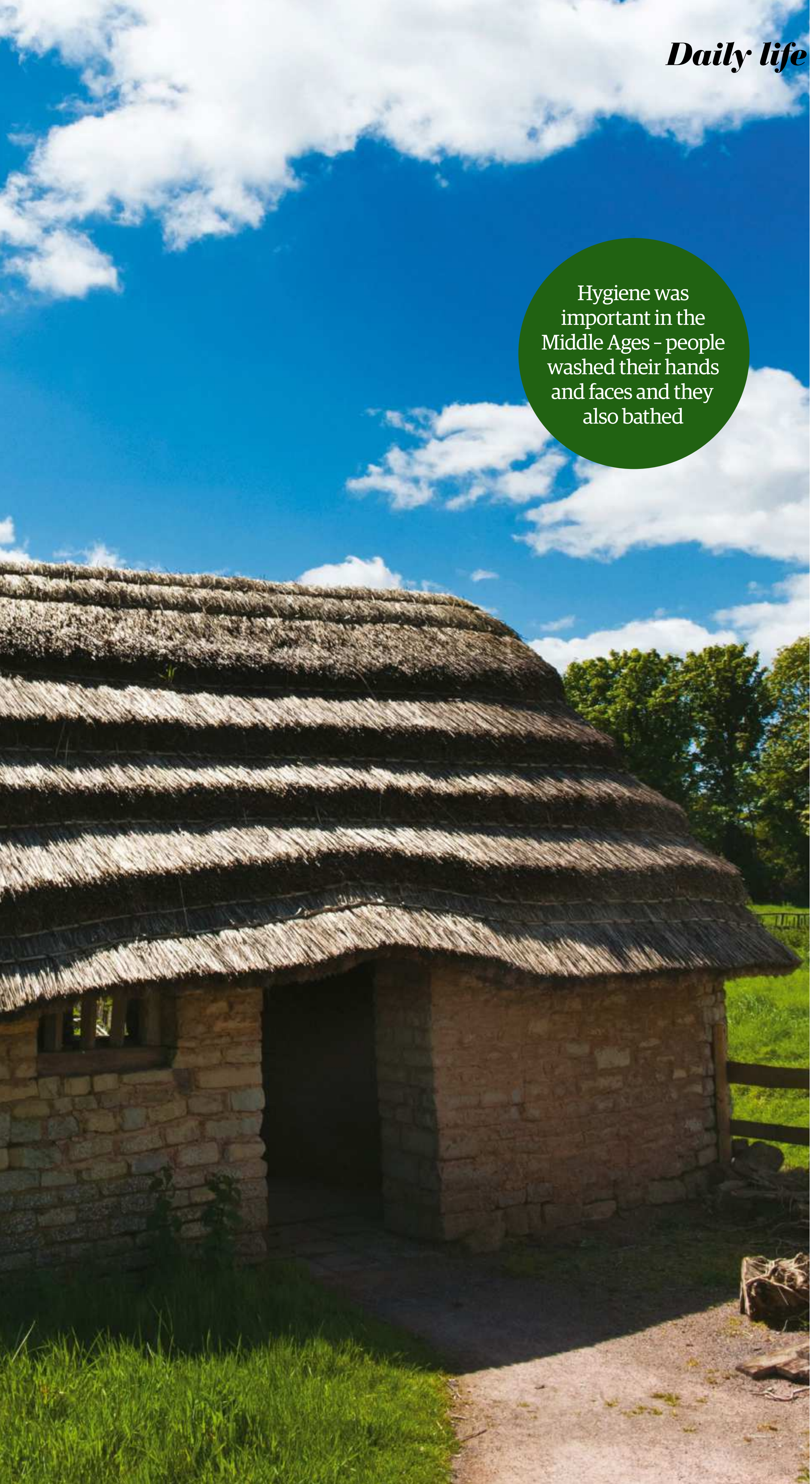
If they wanted to leave the manor, they needed to gain permission, and they also had to pay taxes, including a tithe to the Church. While their situation was made all the worse for having to labour by hand, groups of peasants also worked together on the big tasks. They also got days off on Sundays, saints' days and religious festivals.

Peasants had houses within the village manor, living in one- or two-room cottages built from sticks, straw and mud. They were sparsely equipped and a world away from the homes of the ruling class. They would lie on straw mattresses and heat their homes using a stone hearth. But with no chimney, the homes were smoky, and poorly lit thanks to the tiny windows.

The lord and his family, meanwhile, had lavishly decorated houses built from stone. They had servants who would cook, clean and launder, cottagers to carry out basic labouring jobs, bakers to make bread, blacksmiths to forge weapons and barbers who would double as doctors and dentists. None of these were afforded to the peasants and the average overall lifespan was close to 35.

Housing standards improved during the plague pandemic. Many peasants were killed in 1348, leading to a shortage of labour, and they were able to command higher wages as a result. Attempts were made to restrict their freedom of movement through the Ordinance of Labourers in 1349, but by then the landscape had changed.

This reconstructed house with its thatched roof is typical of the homes seen in the 14th century



Hygiene was important in the Middle Ages - people washed their hands and faces and they also bathed

The small Medieval town of Dinkelsbühl, Germany. Parts of its history still stand proud today

Creating a better life

Medieval craftsmen

Just above the peasant class were craftsmen, who were better educated. Some worked as blacksmiths or goldsmiths, while others were involved in pottery, the minting of money, the making of longbows or the production of bread. Craftsmen organised themselves into guilds, which offered protection and helped establish set prices.

Tool making

To better work the land, peasants created their own tools, fashioning them out of wood and leather as well as the horns of cows and sheep. They were invariably crude but certainly better than nothing. Animals were used to help with the larger tasks such as ploughing fields and hauling goods.

Criminal justice

Wrongdoings were severely punished, with fines, mutilation, the humiliation of the stocks and hanging all very much routine. It was believed that fear of punishments would deter the majority of criminals. Jury trials took place at the manorial court with the more serious offenders facing trial by ordeal.

Town living

Most people lived in villages but as populations grew, bustling towns emerged, which also allowed for trade between villages. Owned by a lord to whom merchants paid taxes, many towns sought to become a self-governing borough, which granted a level of tax relief. Townspeople were called burghers.

Breaking free

There was a way to break free from serfdom, even if it could lead to a loss of security, protection and justice. By running away and avoiding detection for a year and a day, a serf could become free. Saving some money to buy land would gain freedom too.

The Medieval family

Although the Medieval writer Hostensius argued that girls were ready for marriage at 12 and boys at 14, teenage weddings were only typical among the wealthy aristocracy. In those cases, they were arranged and generally conducted for political reasons and so it very often meant that the couple were not necessarily deeply in love.

For the rest of society, though, it was more common for couples to marry later and, while women would often be younger than their husbands, a man tended to want the means to support his family before committing. The upside was that peasants were most likely to marry for love and couples would tend to be far closer than those further up the chain.

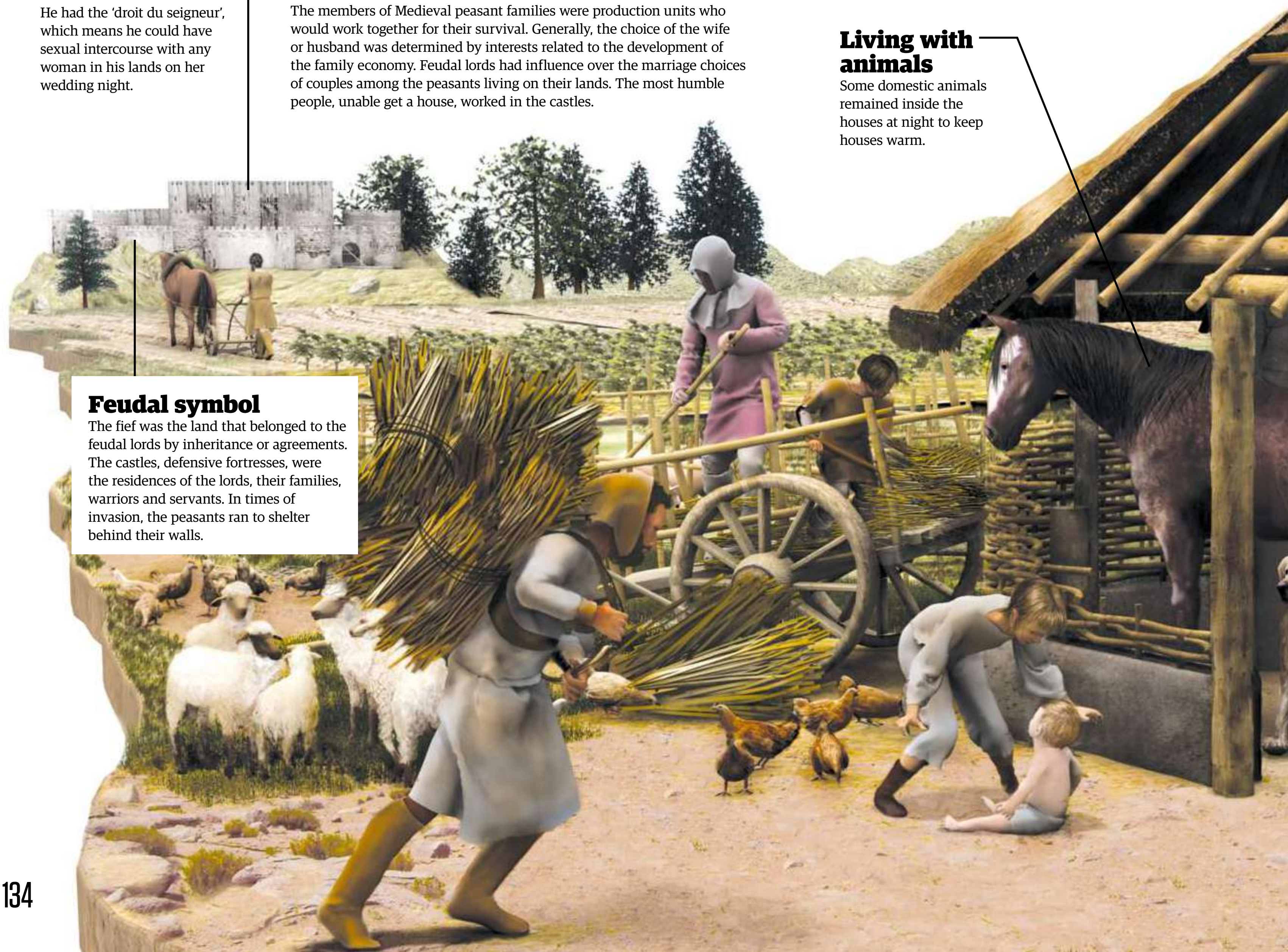
Indeed, the poorest people would sleep and socialise together and they also ate at the same table. Wives would prepare the food, ranging from a breakfast pottage - a hearty, predominantly vegetable-based broth to fill the husband's ravenous belly - to the cooking of rabbit, pork, fish and other meats to accompany an otherwise narrow diet of bread and vegetables.

Women also worked just as hard, if not harder, than their male counterparts. As well as completing the domestic chores and looking after the children, they would knuckle down and help their husbands in the field, especially during the busiest harvesting periods. They tended to the livestock and ensured that their families were clothed, but many also had jobs of their own.

Certainly in the towns, women would work in baking, textile manufacturing and brewing. Another popular job for women was the spinning of thread to form yarn. The lives of the less fortunate could not have been more different from the rich, though. In upper-class society, servants would produce banquets laden with the best variety and quality of food on offer. Meanwhile, the wealthier women would look after the household and be surrounded by lots of helpers.

Poorer women were helped in their domestic duties by their children once they reached the age of around seven. In the villages, children were expected to learn from their parents and they were prepared for domestic chores and husbandry. In the towns, children tended to fall under the eye of their employer or master as they became servants or started to learn a trade as an apprentice.

There was often heartache for families, though. Poor healthcare meant infant mortality rates were high and a quarter of babies died before they reached their first birthday. Many women also became widows since their older husbands would die before them, shattering what was once a close-knit family unit and putting extra pressure on those left behind.



Feudal Lord
He had the 'droit du seigneur', which means he could have sexual intercourse with any woman in his lands on her wedding night.

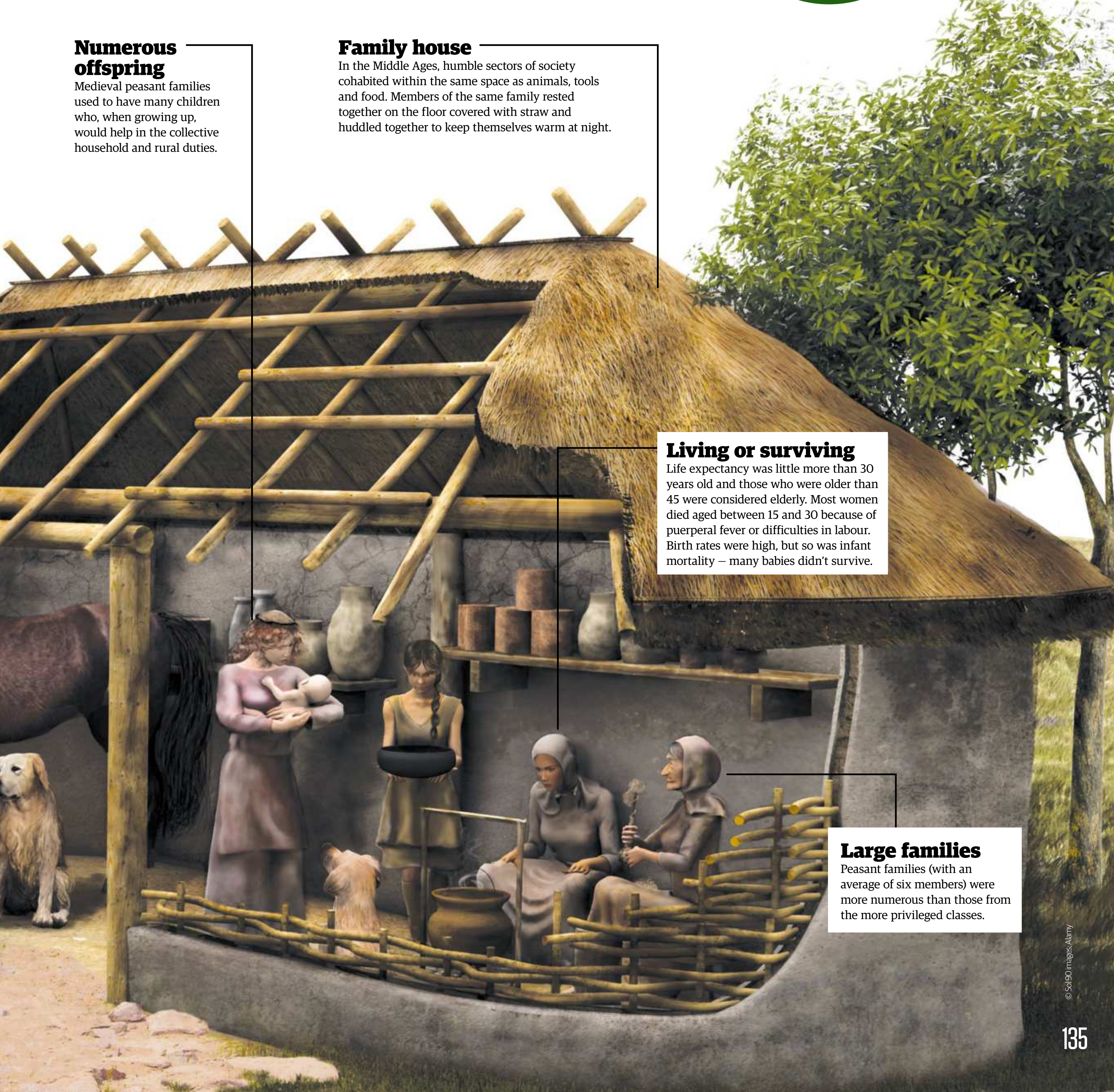
Links and interests
The members of Medieval peasant families were production units who would work together for their survival. Generally, the choice of the wife or husband was determined by interests related to the development of the family economy. Feudal lords had influence over the marriage choices of couples among the peasants living on their lands. The most humble people, unable get a house, worked in the castles.

Living with animals
Some domestic animals remained inside the houses at night to keep houses warm.

Feudal symbol
The fief was the land that belonged to the feudal lords by inheritance or agreements. The castles, defensive fortresses, were the residences of the lords, their families, warriors and servants. In times of invasion, the peasants ran to shelter behind their walls.

> "As well as completing the domestic chores and looking after the children, women would knuckle down and help their husbands in the field"

There was time for fun and entertainment, with dancing, cockfighting, wrestling and ball games proving popular



Numerous offspring
Medieval peasant families used to have many children who, when growing up, would help in the collective household and rural duties.

Family house
In the Middle Ages, humble sectors of society cohabited within the same space as animals, tools and food. Members of the same family rested together on the floor covered with straw and huddled together to keep themselves warm at night.

Living or surviving
Life expectancy was little more than 30 years old and those who were older than 45 were considered elderly. Most women died aged between 15 and 30 because of puerperal fever or difficulties in labour. Birth rates were high, but so was infant mortality – many babies didn't survive.

Large families
Peasant families (with an average of six members) were more numerous than those from the more privileged classes.

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A Medieval banquet

Feast your eyes upon a culinary extravaganza from the Middle Ages

When Crusaders returned from the Holy Land, it wasn't just new territory they brought back with them. The campaign exposed knights and noblemen to the culinary delights of the East: the exotic flavours, the lavish presentation, the elegant manners, and the political undertones. Whereas before their meals had been simple affairs with basic home-grown ingredients, suddenly the wealthy families of Medieval Europe were hosting enormous banquets, inviting guests from far and wide, and using them to flaunt riches and forge alliances.

Norman castles were built with a central Great Hall where the banquets were held. New Year and Pentecost always warranted a feast, but the greatest ones were in honour of weddings, coronations or the installation of a new bishop. At these events, the guests were often family members of similar social status to the nobles who hosted them, but at the end of the harvest, local farmers and labourers were invited to share in the frivolities of the famous Medieval banquet.

Menu

Pottage – a soup of meat and vegetables

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Roasted wild boar, venison, salmon and pike

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Peacock stuffed with goose, pheasant, hen, duck, partridge and quail

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Savoury and sweet tarts

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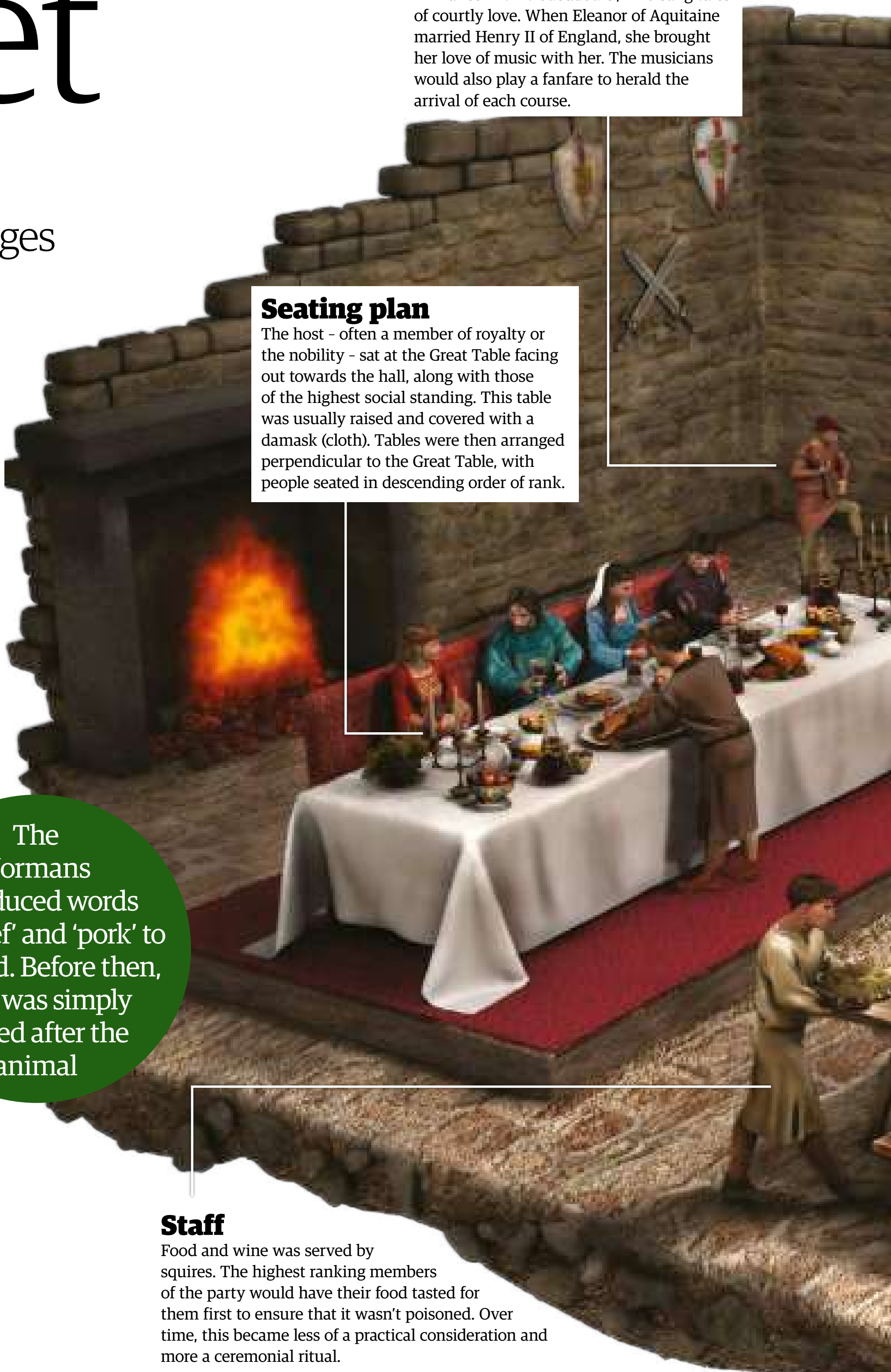
Candied fruits and cheeses

The Normans introduced words like 'beef' and 'pork' to England. Before then, meat was simply named after the animal



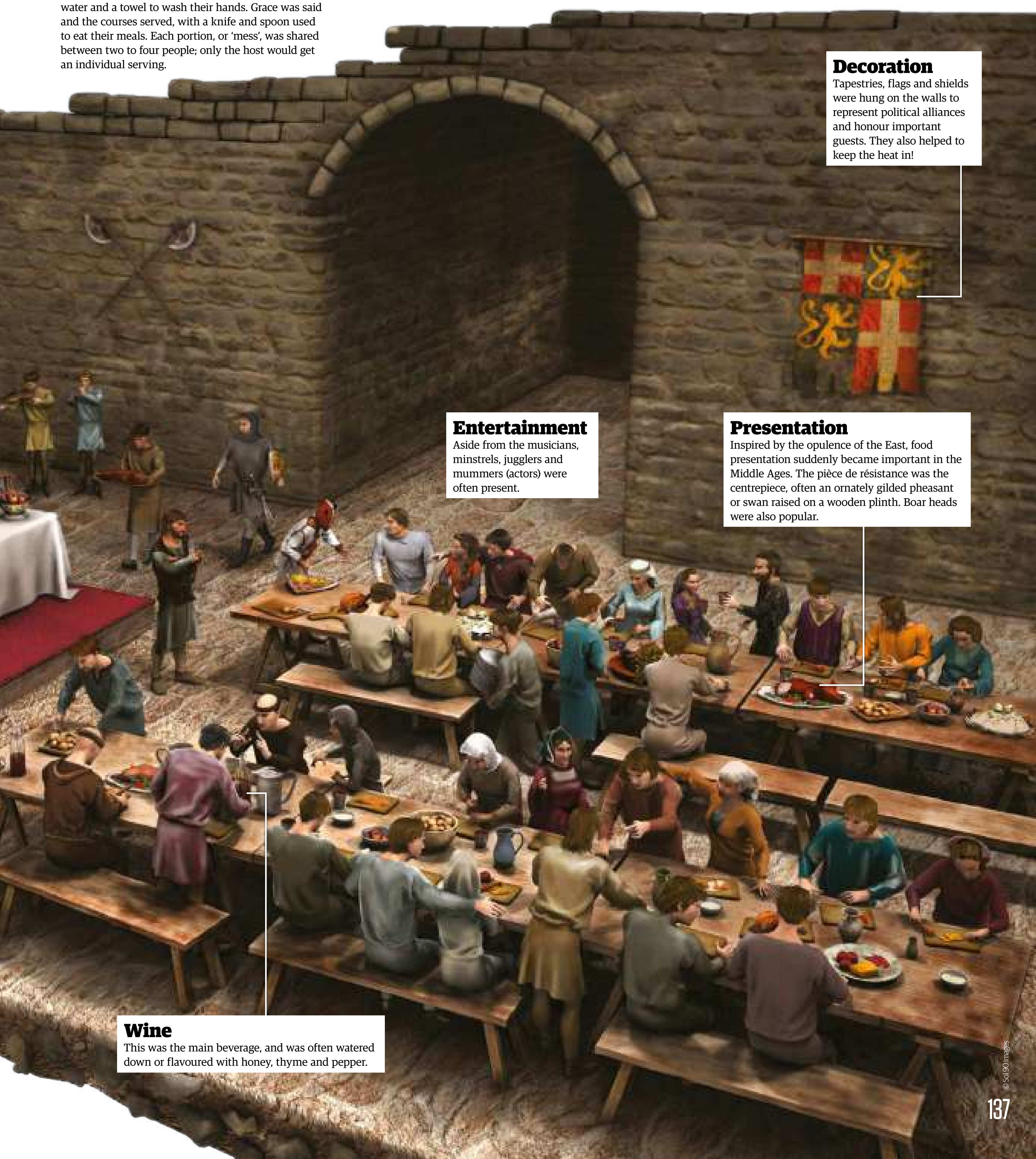
Musicians
Most Great Halls featured a minstrels' gallery or raised area to accommodate musicians. The tradition of having background music during a meal originated in France with 'troubadours', who sang tales of courtly love. When Eleanor of Aquitaine married Henry II of England, she brought her love of music with her. The musicians would also play a fanfare to herald the arrival of each course.

Seating plan
The host – often a member of royalty or the nobility – sat at the Great Table facing out towards the hall, along with those of the highest social standing. This table was usually raised and covered with a damask (cloth). Tables were then arranged perpendicular to the Great Table, with people seated in descending order of rank.

Staff
Food and wine was served by squires. The highest ranking members of the party would have their food tasted for them first to ensure that it wasn't poisoned. Over time, this became less of a practical consideration and more a ceremonial ritual.

Etiquette

Before entering the Great Hall, guests were given water and a towel to wash their hands. Grace was said and the courses served, with a knife and spoon used to eat their meals. Each portion, or 'mess', was shared between two to four people; only the host would get an individual serving.



Decoration

Tapestries, flags and shields were hung on the walls to represent political alliances and honour important guests. They also helped to keep the heat in!

Entertainment

Aside from the musicians, minstrels, jugglers and mummers (actors) were often present.

Presentation

Inspired by the opulence of the East, food presentation suddenly became important in the Middle Ages. The pièce de résistance was the centrepiece, often an ornately gilded pheasant or swan raised on a wooden plinth. Boar heads were also popular.

Wine

This was the main beverage, and was often watered down or flavoured with honey, thyme and pepper.

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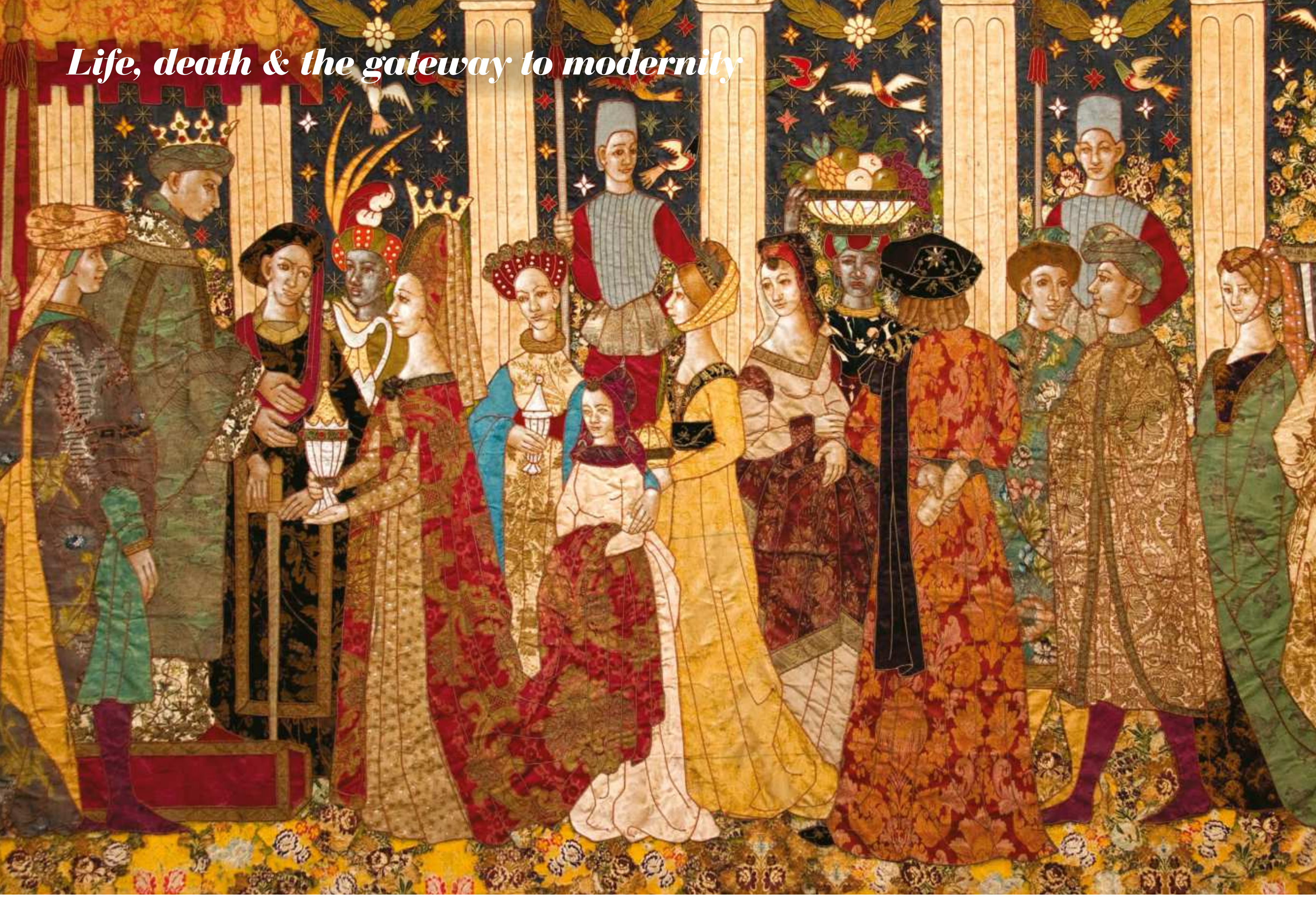


Arts and culture in Medieval Europe

For the better part of 1,000 years, art, architecture, literature and music reflected the golden eras and darkest times of the Middle Ages

During the long years of the Medieval period, the arts represented the potently pious nature of society and the eventual slow and steady emergence of more daring and provocative ideas. Much like the Middle Ages themselves, the arts that emerged in this period represented a deeply spiritual, even fearful, state of mind. Art was either informative (taking the form of grand manuscripts, tapestries, mosaics and traditional paintings) or functional (ranging from embroidery and silversmithing to ceramics and heraldry), and always represented a beautiful, yet stifled quality. Colours were often more expensive than the artists that worked with them, with gold leaf and Afghan ultramarine adorning both religious and secular artworks.

Practicality was also represented in the architecture of the age, and it's here we can see the true nature of the Middle Ages begin to manifest. European architects began to construct buildings not for their artistic merit or beauty, but for the strength of their function. The Middle Ages was not an age of opulence, discovery and hedonism as life had been for the Romans - this was an age of uncertainty, war, plague and poverty. As such, construction in the Medieval mind became one geared toward protection and 'manorialism' - where your home was also your castle.

Much like art, music and literature were also transformed. Where before music had become an avenue of lavish expression, where no creative thought was denied, it was now stifled… for a time, at least. The Church used its influence to ensure all such mediums were an expression of religious devotion via hymns and the like. It exerted an absolute control - one that would cause the most friction within another creative medium: literature. The written word presented a powerful means of control for the Church, one exacerbated by widespread illiteracy. But the powers that be knew that the illegal dissemination of unsanctioned literature was perhaps the greatest threat of all.

A historical canvas

As Europe and the world descended into the Middle Ages, the hedonistic and illusionary world of classical art was transformed into a far more reserved creature

Medieval art embodies one of the most singular periods of artistic expression in European history. Unlike the classical era the preceded it and the advent of the Renaissance that followed it, the Middle Ages represented a society ruled by one powerful force: the fear of God. The Church of the Medieval era was one obsessed with the fire, brimstone and wrath of the Old Testament and it filtered this vision of a wrathful deity down to the society it influenced so heavily.

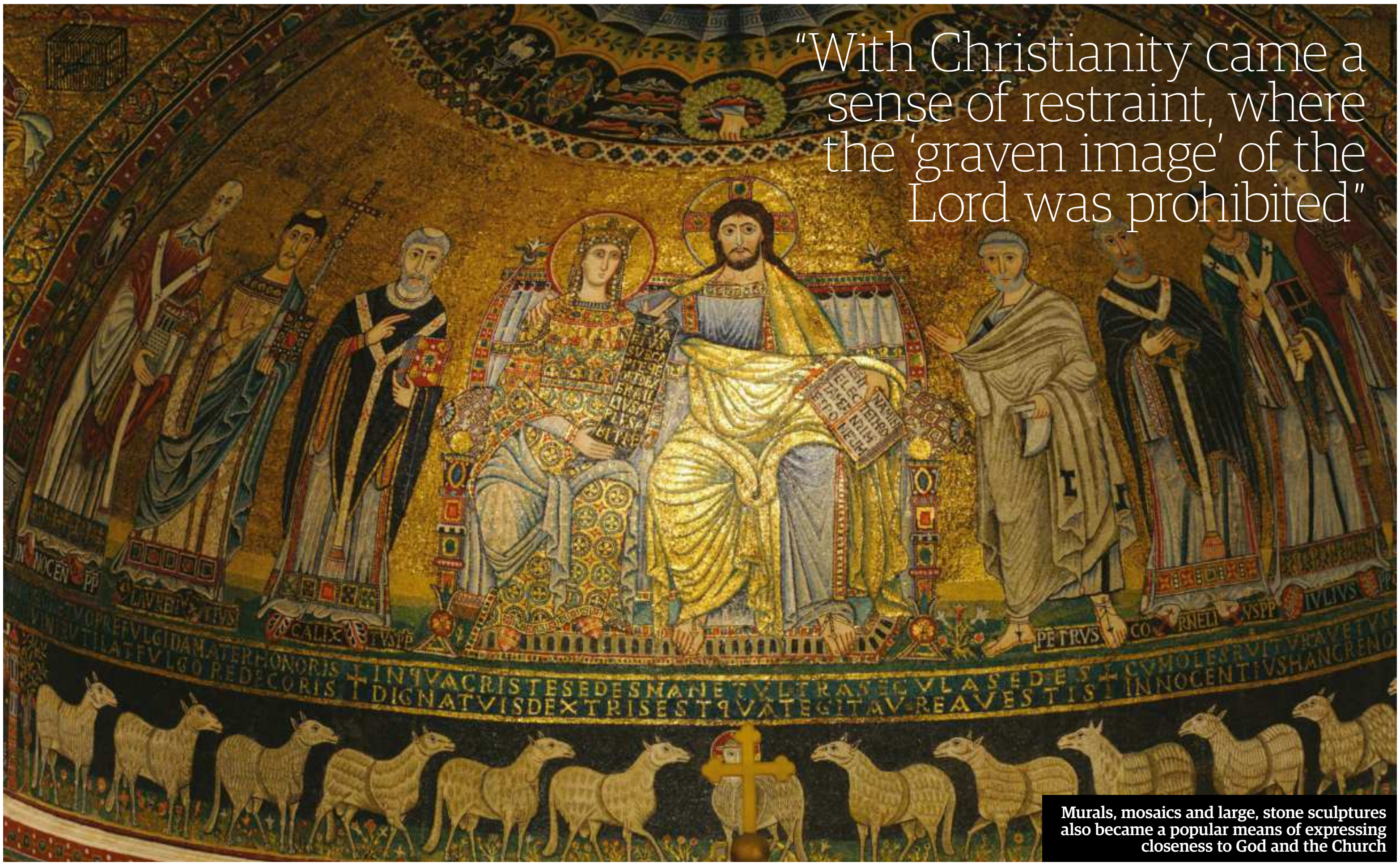
Much of this came from the clash of the classical with the Christian point of view. Prior to the advent of Christianity across the continent, the arts propagated by the Greeks and the Romans were illusionary, representing the gods as the ideal image of man in all his or her glory. These were hedonistic cultures, unhindered by the inhibitions that would inform the centuries to come. With Christianity came a sense of restraint, where the 'graven image' of the Lord was prohibited. It created a war within the artists of the Middle Ages - a need to protect the piety of a society ruled by the Church, while also tempering the inherent desire for expression.

This saw the artistic consciousness move from the illusionary to the abstract: kinetic realism became stiff and formal. The lifelike details so well used in the classical style were abandoned in favour of flatter imagery, devoid of detail, shading and perspective.

> The art of the Byzantine Empire helped influence the flat, depthless art of the Middle Ages

This style, represented in everything from royal depictions to tapestries enabled the troubled soul of the early Christian to create a distance between its hedonistic pagan past and the regimented nature of its Christian present. And it would be this compromise that would enable the classical style to re-emerge in the very first Renaissance in the 14th century.

Art in the Middle Ages may have fallen largely under the religious banner, but there were still influences that crept in and shaped the styles and methods used. Historians have classified these into seven distinct styles - Early Christian art, Migration Period art, Byzantine art, Insular art, Pre-Romanesque, Romanesque art and Gothic art. As we'll see later on with the transformation of architecture in the Middle Ages, the influence of Pre-Romanesque and Romanesque styles (and, as a result, Byzantine art) formed a foundation for how artistic endeavours developed throughout the period. Even after its fall, the Roman Empire informed the prevalence of pietistic paintings (thanks to the rise of Christianity in Rome via Constantine I), the incorporation of brightly coloured stained glass, the use of fine metals, gilt work and enamel to decorate caskets and shrines and the introduction of grand embroidery such as the Bayeux Tapestry.



> "With Christianity came a sense of restraint, where the 'graven image' of the Lord was prohibited"

Murals, mosaics and large, stone sculptures also became a popular means of expressing closeness to God and the Church

The influence of the Gothic style in its original form can be seen in some of Europe's grandest cathedrals, such as Notre Dame in Paris

The rise of Medieval construction

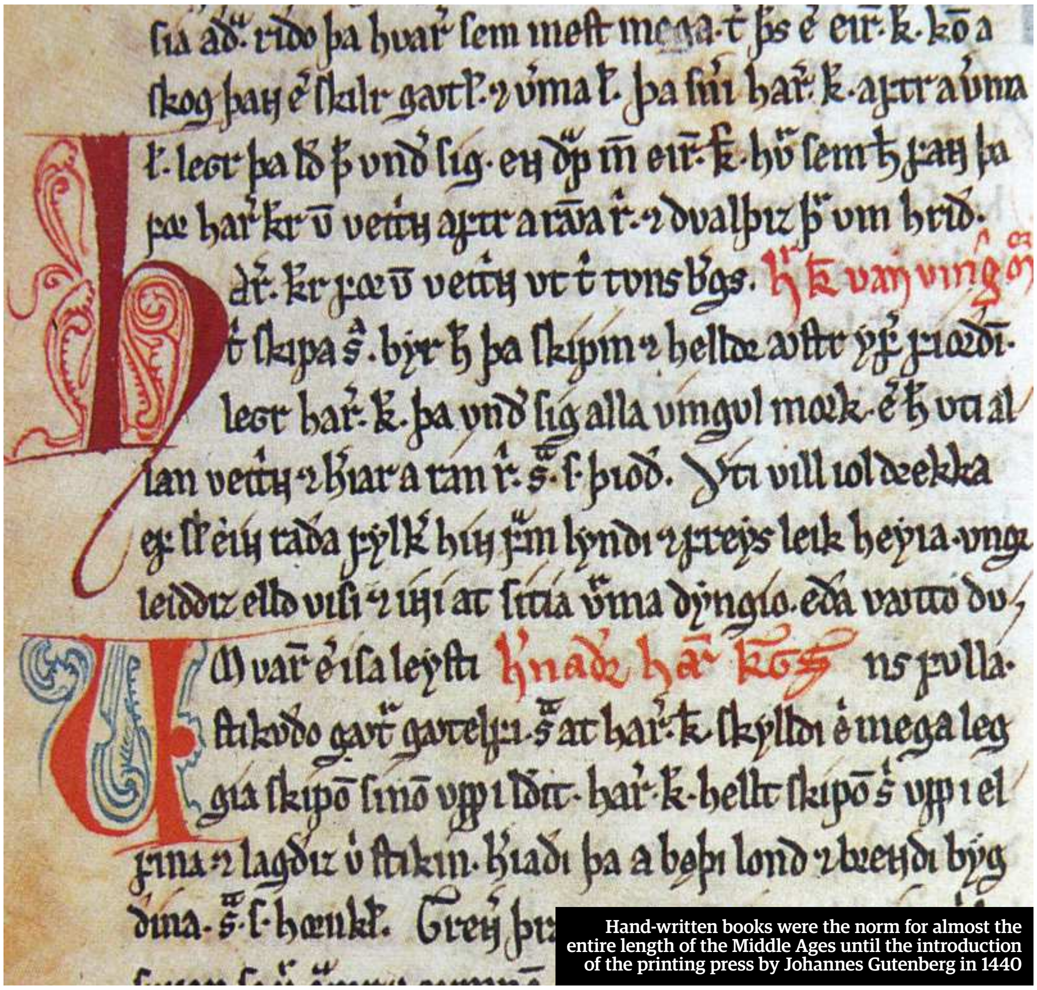
As the Middle Ages gripped Europe, architecture and construction began to evolve into an era readied for war

Much like the development of its art, the architectural DNA of the Middle Ages was not original. Instead, it was cross-pollinated with a number of construction styles. These were subdivided into three distinct types of construction that typified Medieval society – religious, military and civic architecture – with the creation of religious sites of worship owing influence to both the Romanesque style and the Gothic.

The common 'cross-shaped' blueprint that was used across most churches in the Medieval period came from the use of a Roman basilica (a central or main chamber), with the introduction of domes and 'Greek crosses' being added in from the Byzantine period. That Roman touch helped introduce a far more lavish building style, one that used arches, barrel vaults and cruciform piers supporting vaults to create a symmetrical feel both inside and out. The opulence of the Roman age also shaped the gilded nature of religious architecture and its dressings.

Gothic architecture was also popular and began to appear from the 11th and 12th centuries onward. As Europe experienced a return to the Greek philosophy of humanism, the architectural style began to incorporate buildings that favoured intricate detail. The architecture of the Goths soon spread from religious sites to civil buildings – soon features such as flying buttresses, pointed arches, vaulted ceilings and stained glass windows were commonplace.

The era also saw the rise of a new building, built out of the need for protection – the castle. Springing up around the 9th and 10th centuries, castles were fortified structures designed to protect a small palace or manor, or serve as a first line of defence against invasions. Early versions used wood and timber, but later Middle Age castles began using stone, forming the entire structure around a central keep or tower.



Hand-written books were the norm for almost the entire length of the Middle Ages until the introduction of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in 1440

The power of the written word

From an era where the average person was illiterate for their entire life came some of the most influential examples of literature ever committed to paper

Before the Middle Ages, there was no real form of literature in Britain and beyond. Histories, recipes for medicine, concepts of engineering and more were passed down by word-of-mouth and it made for a personal if somewhat inaccurate form of preserving information. With the powerful rise of the Roman Catholic Church came the importance of scripture, with Medieval books painstakingly hand-copied and illustrated by monks (a process that would take years even for a single volume). Paper was a rarity too, so alternatives such as vellum (made from calf's skin) and parchment (made from lamb or goat skin) a useful alternative.

With a majority of the people in the Middle Ages being so poor, most never learned to read or write, so the only source of education came from the Church. This position granted the Christian faith an unrivalled power to share news of the realm while disseminating a fear of God that filled its coffers and kept the people thankful for its existence. Religious scripture may have formed the backbone that brought the written word to the people of the Middle Ages, but it managed to open the door for a burgeoning new world of literature.

Textbooks began to circulate, packed with enlightening theories on both spirituality and medicine; stories of Arthurian legends were finally written down and shared, along with one of the earliest written Western myths – the epic poem of Scandinavian hero, Beowulf. From the Middle Ages we saw the rise of social commentary and satire in the form of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and the first true piece of travel writing in the form of *The Travels of Marco Polo*.

Melodies from the Dark Ages

Despite the bleak events that characterised the Middle Ages, this Medieval period formed the origins of popular music

Much like every other form of art and culture in the Middle Ages, music came in two very different forms. The first was informed by the doctrine of the church and the other by the performance of song, poems and stories by travelling performers. As a patron of the arts, the Roman Catholic Church used music as 'plainchant', a form of monophonic religious singing that appeared as the Gregorian Chant. Using a simple, single melody, this plainchant became a uniform part of church services across Europe and provided one of many ways the church used to expunge the traces of the Pagan cultures that had preceded it.

The use of monophonic chanting remains a musical style we still closely associate with Christian worship through the ages, but that doesn't mean ecclesiastical music never evolved beyond that form. During the 9th century, musical theorists in the Church began experimenting with the concept of two melodies, each one running simultaneously alongside one another. It sounds simple now, but at the time it was revolutionary and later thrived in the 12th and 13th century in iconic places of worship such as the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, France.

> During the Middle Ages, music was often played in between meal times as it was thought to help with the digestion of food

Music also thrived outside of religious oversight, with the Trouvères (otherwise known as the Troubadours) becoming the most common means of spreading song throughout the High Middle Ages. The songs of these roving performers were secular to begin with, but soon grew to include musical tales of love, loss and the human spirit. Unlike the reserved presentation of plainchant, these performances were often lively and fun – a means of entertainment and education rolled into one.

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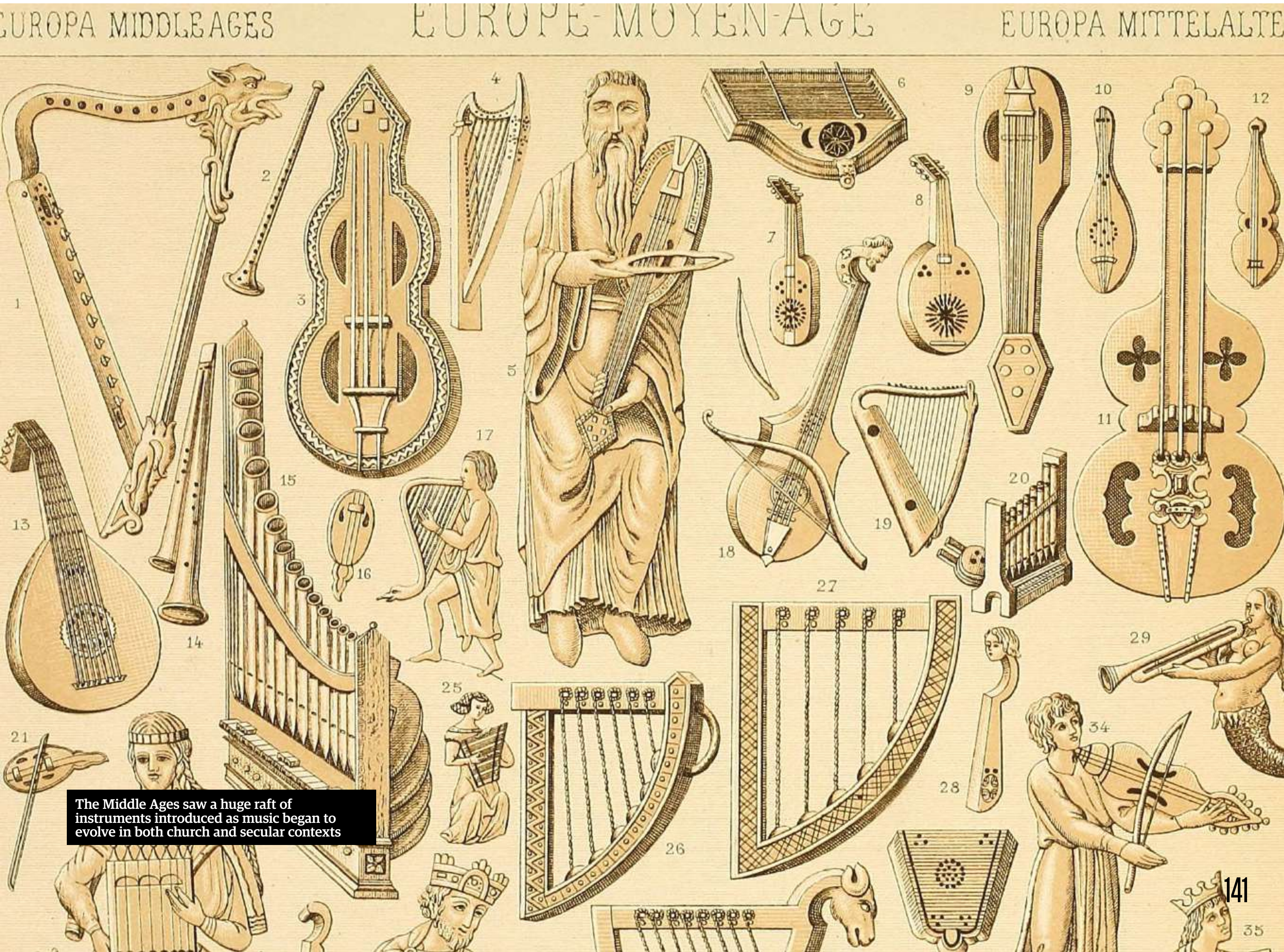


The Middle Ages saw a huge raft of instruments introduced as music began to evolve in both church and secular contexts

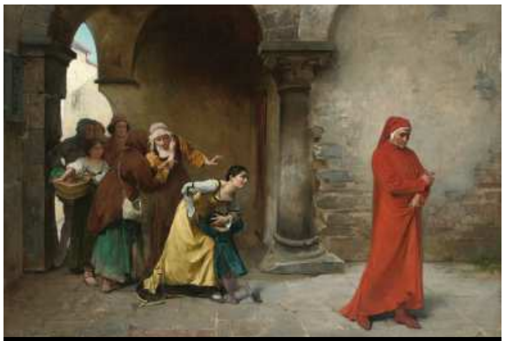
Pope Benedict XV praised Dante as being one of 'the many celebrated geniuses of whom the Catholic faith can boast'

Dante Alighieri

The father of the Italian language, who questioned man's eternal destiny and brought literary masterpieces to the masses

Dante's true birth date is unknown to this day, though his birth is believed to have occurred between May and June 1265. He was born in the Republic of Florence to a family with deep connections to the tumultuous political scene that was unravelling at the time. His father was from a family loyal to the Guelphs who were in support of the papacy, while another prominent family, the Ghibellines, were loyal to the Holy Roman Emperor. This resulted in power struggles and, through virtue of his birth, Dante would find himself thrust into the centre of them.

Before Dante reached the age of ten, his mother, Bella, passed away. His father would go on to sire two more children, Dante's half-brother Francesco, and a sister, Tana. In the tradition of the period, and being a young nobleman, Dante was betrothed to Gemma di Manetto Donati. As with most Medieval betrothals it was purely a political one - the boy was just 12 years old and the match would link the Alighieri family with the powerful Donati family. Although Dante was young at the time, there is evidence that he wasn't entirely happy with this betrothal and the reason why is simple - he was in love with another. He first saw Beatrice Portinari when he was just nine years old and would later claim that it was love at first sight. Although he was besotted with her, Dante's love for Beatrice was distant and, as far as we can tell, unrequited.



Dante is often depicted as wearing red as it was a colour exclusively worn by the nobility to show their wealth and power

However, this was an enduring infatuation that would continue throughout the rest of his life, Beatrice appeared in several of his sonnets and love poems, while his wife appeared in none. Beatrice's premature and unexpected death in 1290 had a profound effect upon the love-struck Dante, who began to delve into the world of philosophy and politics.

In 1289 Dante took part in the Battle of Campaldino, fighting alongside the Guelph cavalry – his contribution to the victory would impact upon his own life. The reformation of the Florentine constitution meant that anyone who wished to take part in public life had to join one of the city's guilds. Dante joined the Physicians and Apothecaries guild but it is unlikely he had much interest in it, and used it simply so he could serve in the people's council. He would later also become one of the six priors of Florence and a member of the Council of One Hundred. Although he did not achieve anything particularly influential during this time, Dante was very much embroiled in and part of the restless world of politics that gripped Florence.

After their victory over the Ghibellines, the Guelphs had divided into two factions, and Dante joined the White Guelphs who desired more freedom from the influence of Rome, while the Black Guelphs supported the Pope. Initially the whites claimed power, however the Pope responded by planning a military occupation of the city. In order to ascertain the Pope's intentions a number of delegates were sent to Rome, and Dante was among them. While Dante was in Rome the Blacks invaded, destroying the city and slaughtering their enemies. Because of his association with the Whites, Dante was deemed an absconder – returning to his beloved city of Florence would mean certain death, and so Dante found himself condemned to perpetual exile.

Increasingly disillusioned with politics, Dante vowed to become a party of one. Although he had previously published books of verse before, most notably *Vita Nuova*, which tells the story of his tragic love for Beatrice, exile allowed Dante the time to focus on his more artistic pursuits, and it is during these years that he penned some of his most influential work. He travelled to Bologna in 1304 where he began work on his Latin Treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.

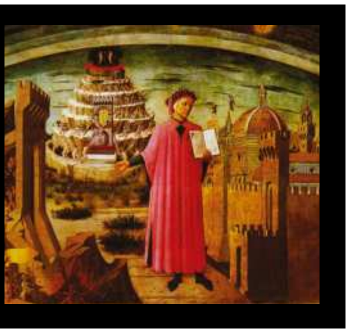
In 1306 Dante found himself expelled again as all Florentine exiles were ordered out of Bologna. The poet ended up in Padua, but for the following few years his whereabouts are unknown, with some even placing him in Paris. In 1308 Dante's hopes of finally returning to his beloved city were stoked as Henry of Luxembourg was elected emperor as Henry VII. Dante hoped he could restore order to the warring cities, uniting Church and state. However, when Henry died in 1313, Dante's hopes of ever returning to the city vanished with him, and he returned to live in Verona. It was during this period that Dante began to pen most his most famous work, *The Divine Comedy*.

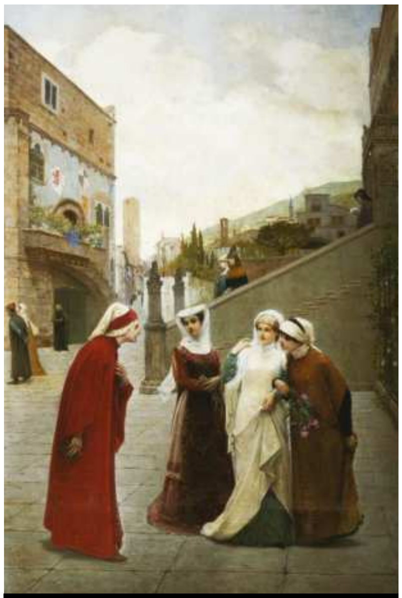
Perhaps the most famous of Dante's quotes is 'Abandon all hope, all ye who enter here' inscribed above the gates of Hell

Dante twice refused the pardons that were extended to him, as they came with large fines and humiliating penances. Due to this he and his sons were condemned to death as rebels against the republic. Despite this, Dante still hoped that through his work he could earn esteem and return to the city of his birth on honourable terms. The pain of his exile and sentence can be seen in many of the verses of his most famous epic poem, but Dante did live a happy and peaceful life in Ravenna, where he spent his last years with his children. Shortly after finishing *The Divine Comedy* Dante died, possibly due to malaria contracted on a diplomatic mission to Venice. Aged 56, Dante was buried in Ravenna at the Church of San Pier Maggiore. A tomb was later erected in his honour in 1483.

The Divine Comedy

Originally simply called the *Comedy*, Dante's most significant work describes the poet's journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise and, on a deeper level, the soul's journey towards God. It combines many ideas from Medieval Christianity, and includes an array of famous poets such as Virgil, as well as Dante's lost love, Beatrice. The reason *The Divine Comedy* is so significant, apart from the writing itself, is the fact that it was written in the Italian vernacular when almost all work was written in Latin or Greek. This meant that far more people could access it, and it contributed largely to world literacy, ushering in a new age of accessible literature.





A painting depicts the meeting of Dante and Beatrice, who remained the poet's muse despite passing away at the age of just 24

Other works of Dante

La Vita Nuova

This collection of sonnets and canzoni tells the story of courtly love that emerged when Dante encountered Beatrice and culminates in her early death and its impact upon him. It combines prose and verse to represent Dante's own emotional reactions and was groundbreaking in its use of Italian.

De Monarchia

Written in Latin, Dante penned this treatise on secular and religious power during the tumultuous grapple for power between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor. In his writings, Dante argues that both derive their power from God, so therefore one should not reign over the other.

Convivio

Translated as 'The Banquet', this unfinished literary work is comprised of four books that take the form of commentaries on Dante's own poetry. It is far more philosophical in nature than the love-focused *Vita Nuova*, and was originally intended to be a series comprising a total of 15 books.

Le Rime

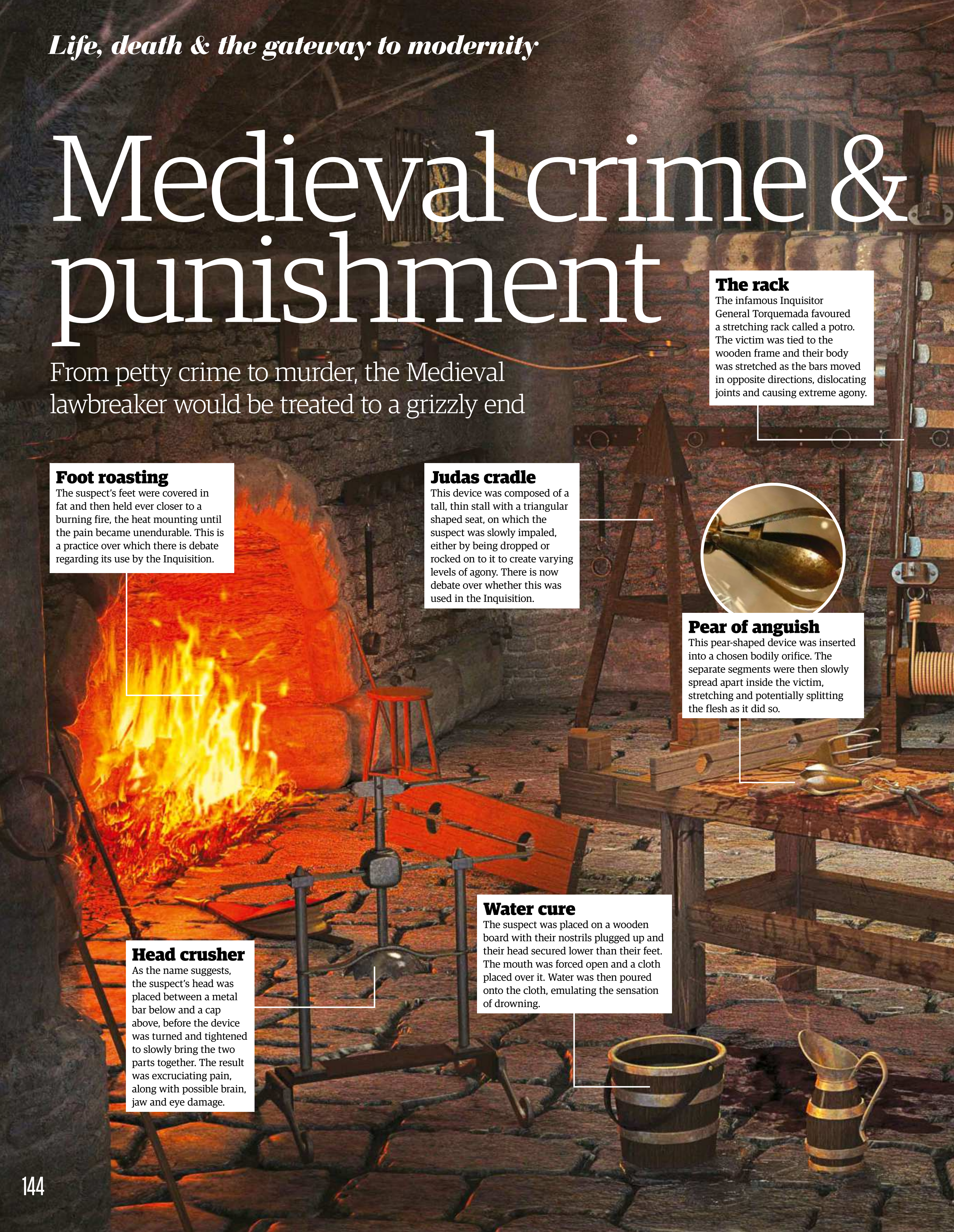
Le Rime is a collection of many poems written by Dante throughout his life concerned with many of the poet's existential philosophical thoughts. They were not originally intended to be a collection by Dante himself, but were instead collected and organised together by modern critics.

De Vulgari Eloquentia

This Latin treatise discusses Italian dialects, saying that the courtly Italian tongue should be combined with the spoken dialect in order for Italian to become a serious literary language, while also unifying the Italian territories.

Medieval crime & punishment

From petty crime to murder, the Medieval lawbreaker would be treated to a grizzly end



The rack
The infamous Inquisitor General Torquemada favoured a stretching rack called a potro. The victim was tied to the wooden frame and their body was stretched as the bars moved in opposite directions, dislocating joints and causing extreme agony.

Foot roasting
The suspect's feet were covered in fat and then held ever closer to a burning fire, the heat mounting until the pain became unendurable. This is a practice over which there is debate regarding its use by the Inquisition.

Judas cradle
This device was composed of a tall, thin stall with a triangular shaped seat, on which the suspect was slowly impaled, either by being dropped or rocked on to it to create varying levels of agony. There is now debate over whether this was used in the Inquisition.

Pear of anguish
This pear-shaped device was inserted into a chosen bodily orifice. The separate segments were then slowly spread apart inside the victim, stretching and potentially splitting the flesh as it did so.

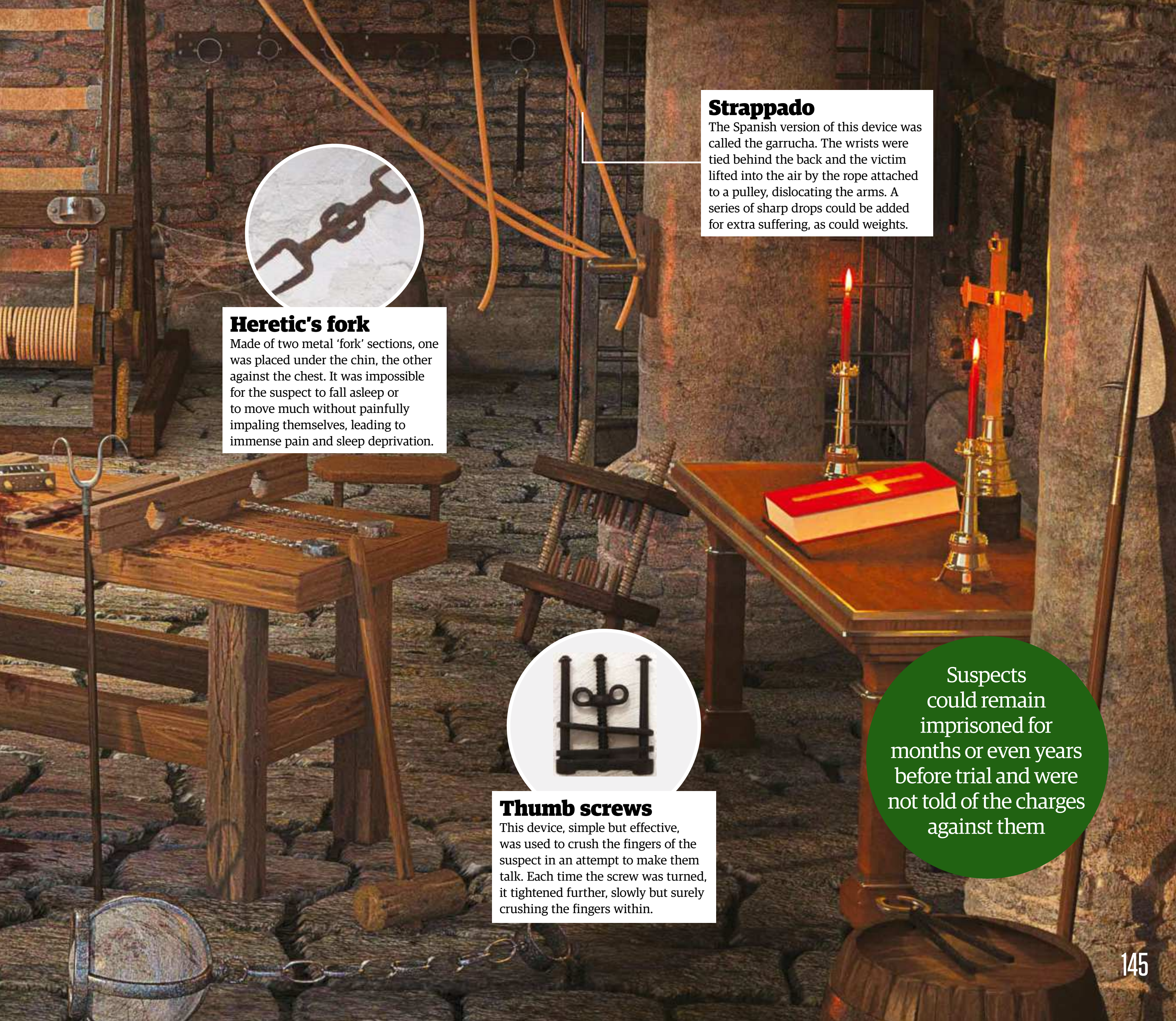
Head crusher
As the name suggests, the suspect's head was placed between a metal bar below and a cap above, before the device was turned and tightened to slowly bring the two parts together. The result was excruciating pain, along with possible brain, jaw and eye damage.

Water cure
The suspect was placed on a wooden board with their nostrils plugged up and their head secured lower than their feet. The mouth was forced open and a cloth placed over it. Water was then poured onto the cloth, emulating the sensation of drowning.

For anyone who broke the law in the Middle Ages, the consequences were dire. As there was no official police force or justice system, punishments were in the hands of the community. There was no centralised prison system so criminals were locked up temporarily in the local gaol and the cells were so pitifully maintained that internees commonly died of illness before trial. If they survived, they were often mutilated or placed in the stocks so the locals could beat the lawbreakers themselves. Of course, if the criminal had some information that the authorities needed to know, there was always the torture chamber, which would make almost any offender give up the name of their accomplices. These chambers would be located deep within the bowels of a castle so the nobles couldn't hear the victim's agonised screams.

King Henry II eventually helped centralise law systems in England in the 12th century, and was the first king to send out judges from London to attend cases around the country - this was done through what was called an 'ordeal'. An incredibly crude form of reasoning, the accused were forced to fight the accuser and the winner would be decreed as the one telling the truth. The victor got off scot-free while the loser died in the mud, no matter who was really being honest. It obviously paid to have a little bit of extra muscle in the Medieval era. There were also ordeals by fire and water, when the accused had to hold a red hot iron bar or was tied up in water. If they survived, it proved their innocence.

Torture was used extensively during the Norman Conquest to exact riches from the Anglo-Saxons, with hanging from the thumbs a favourite of the continental invaders. In this era the lower classes were often blamed for crimes while nobles were more likely to be slapped on the wrist. This inequality, and instances such as the hanging of 44 thieves in one mass execution in England in 1124, helped fuel discontent that resulted in uprisings like the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. Despite this, torture was popular with the public, and would often draw large crowds. A public holiday could even be held if an infamous killer was executed. Eventually, torture was officially abolished in England by 1640, as things got slightly less brutal with the coming of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe.



Strappado
The Spanish version of this device was called the garrucha. The wrists were tied behind the back and the victim lifted into the air by the rope attached to a pulley, dislocating the arms. A series of sharp drops could be added for extra suffering, as could weights.

Heretic's fork
Made of two metal 'fork' sections, one was placed under the chin, the other against the chest. It was impossible for the suspect to fall asleep or to move much without painfully impaling themselves, leading to immense pain and sleep deprivation.

Thumb screws
This device, simple but effective, was used to crush the fingers of the suspect in an attempt to make them talk. Each time the screw was turned, it tightened further, slowly but surely crushing the fingers within.

Suspects could remain imprisoned for months or even years before trial and were not told of the charges against them

Surviving the Black Death

The terrifying true story of the outbreak that crippled the Medieval world

After enjoying generations of sunshine and warmer climes, Europe had undergone an unprecedented population boom that saw more people living on the continent than ever before. At the turn of the first millennium there were 24 million people in Europe, and by 1340 this had reached 54 million.

Entire countries were straining at the edges of their farmlands and eating into the forests, and the availability of food was beginning to reach the limits of population support. A dire evil, however, stalked the land just as the Little Ice Age began, and a century later Europe's population had plummeted to 37 million.

The origins of this bringer of death were in Central Asia. It travelled along the by-now well-travelled Silk Roads, arriving in Crimea in 1346 and making its way across the Mediterranean and around Europe. This monster scurried on a million legs through the dank holds of ships, grain-stuffed silos and mills, filthy streets and docks slick with grime – and much worse in the years to come.

It sprang from the backs of great black rats, borne in the blood of fleas infected with Yersinia pestis, and thrived in the blood-flecked sputum of the plague's violently coughing victims. It wept from the bulbous, stinking sores that erupted in people's groins and armpits. It struck fiercely and mercilessly, bringing down towns in a matter of days, erasing families in mere hours.

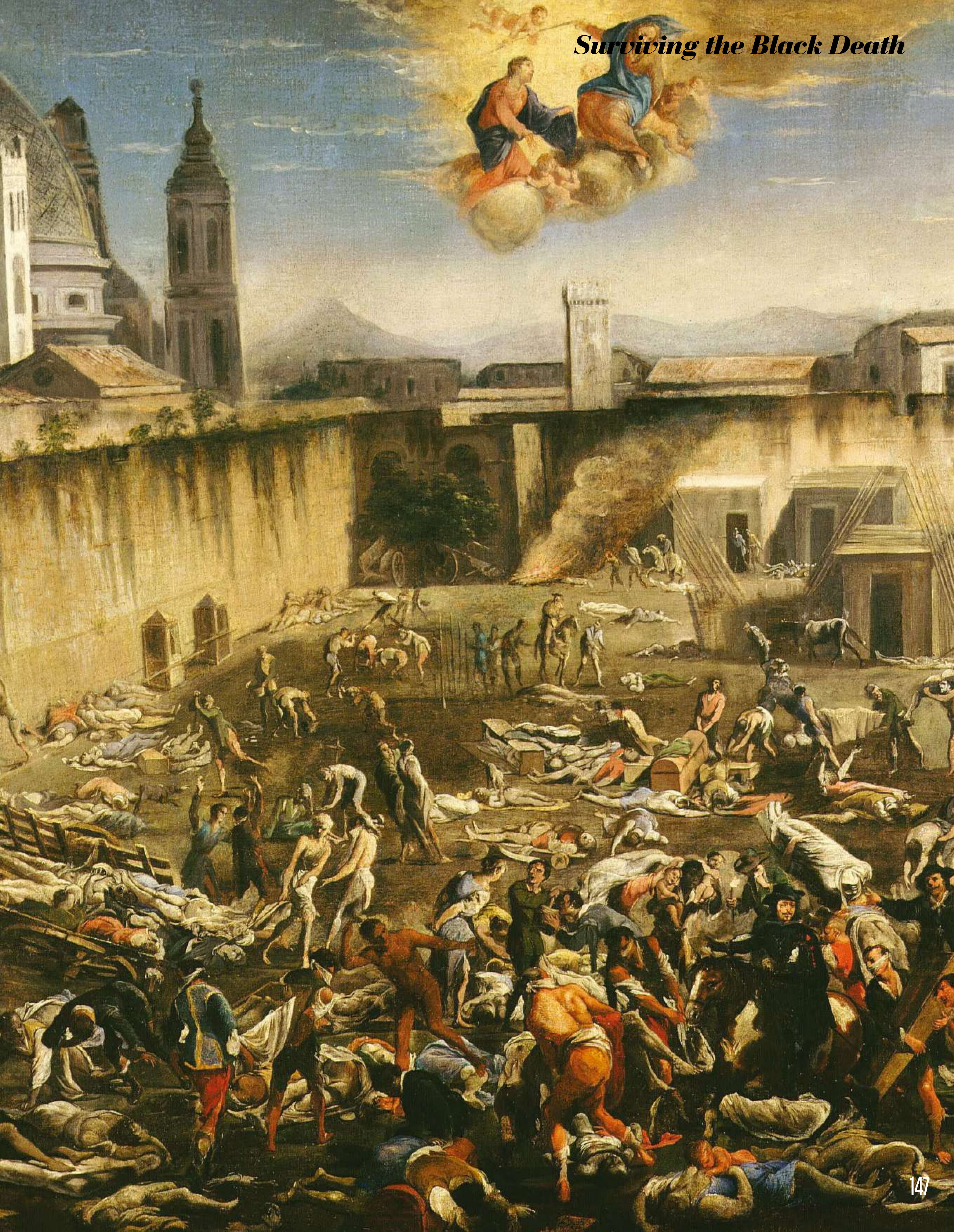
While we now call this great pandemic that brought Europe to its knees in the mid-14th century the Black Death, it was known by a different name at the time – the apocalyptic moniker Pestilence. With the Hundred Years' War sweeping western Europe and conflicts with the unstoppable Golden Horde in the east, famine beginning to cripple countries whose populations were at the limits of sustainability, and then sickness swiftly following – bringing with it death – the people of the world knew that Pestilence was upon them, and many feared the apocalypse was drawing near…

Pestilence is shrouded in mystery, and even now researchers still debate the exact components of the beast and the path it took across the Continent. What is certain is that it originated in the eastern end of the continent, and worked its way through the Mongolian Empire before piercing Caffa (now Feodosiya in Ukraine), Sicily and southern Europe, reaching peak strength as it smashed into France and England.

Scientists agree that its main weapon was bubonic plague, a bacterial disease carried by infected fleas that fed on the black rats ubiquitous to the Continent, but that were also known to dine on other types of rodents, rabbits and, sometimes, larger mammals like cats.

The bacterium itself – Yersinia pestis – was a rather nasty piece of work; it would infect the blood of fleas and then cause a buildup of old blood and cells within the proventriculus (a valve preceding the flea's stomach). This blockage meant that when a hungry flea tried to bite its next victim, the high pressure in its stomach would force some of the ingested blood back into the open wound, along with thousands of bacterial cells that had accumulated in the proventriculus.

This swarm of Yersinia pestis would then drain along the lymphatic tract of the victim from the source of the bite down to the nearest lymph node. Once there, the bacteria would proceed to colonise



the lymph node so entirely that it would swell, stiffen and ooze a rancid pus. Since most people were bitten on their legs, this would usually be the lymph node in the groin. These enlarged lymph nodes, known as buboes, were the main sign of Pestilence; ugly and painful, they ranged from the size of a grape to a fat orange and they made any movement unbearable.

Before the appearance of the buboes though, victims would have a slight warning. Flu-like symptoms would appear first, swiftly followed by a high fever. Within a day or two these would be joined by 'God's tokens' – small circular rashes, also called roses – that would spread over the body and particularly around infected lymph nodes. Caused by weak blood vessel walls and internal haemorrhaging, they were a sure sign that you didn't just have a nasty cold, as noted by Shakespeare: 'the tokened pestilence where death is sure'. Things tended to move quickly once the buboes had boiled up through the skin. Diarrhoea and vomiting would ensue, as often would septic shock due to the buboes bursting, with respiratory failure and pneumonia wiping up the last sops of life. Within two weeks, four out of five people who contracted the plague died.

Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, a chronicler from Siena, Italy, captured the unbridled terror of the time well: 'I do not know where to begin describing its relentless cruelty; almost everyone who witnessed it seemed stupefied by grief. It is not possible for the human tongue to recount such a horrible thing, and those who did not see such horrors can well be called blessed. They died almost immediately; they would swell up under the armpits and in the groin and drop dead while talking. Fathers abandoned their children, wives left their husbands, brothers forsook each other; all fled from each other because it seemed that the disease could be passed on by breath and sight. And so they died, and one could not find people to carry out burials for money or friendship.'

In the face of Pestilence and the approaching end-times, King Philip VI of France commissioned the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Paris to deduce the source of the evil so that it might be eradicated. The findings of these professors did not bode well, for they ascribed the tragedy to the conjunction of Saturn, Mars and Jupiter in Aquarius, and to the position of Saturn in the House of Jupiter – and nothing could be done to challenge the will of the cosmos. At the time, Jupiter was believed to be the source of warm, humid vapours, while hot, dry Mars was thought to ignite them. These pestilential vapours were thought to form a thick, stinking smog of sickness known as a miasma, which was compounded by the sulphurous eruptions of volcanoes and wrathful power of earthquakes.

Believed to be the main culprit of the Black Death, people gave up bathing (as it opened the pores to miasma), barricaded themselves in closed rooms hung with thick tapestries to block out the poisoned air and took to carrying nosegays and pomanders to avail themselves of the evil stench. None of this would save them though.

> "It was a staggering loss in this age of arable farming, when the majority of the country's wealth lay in the land"

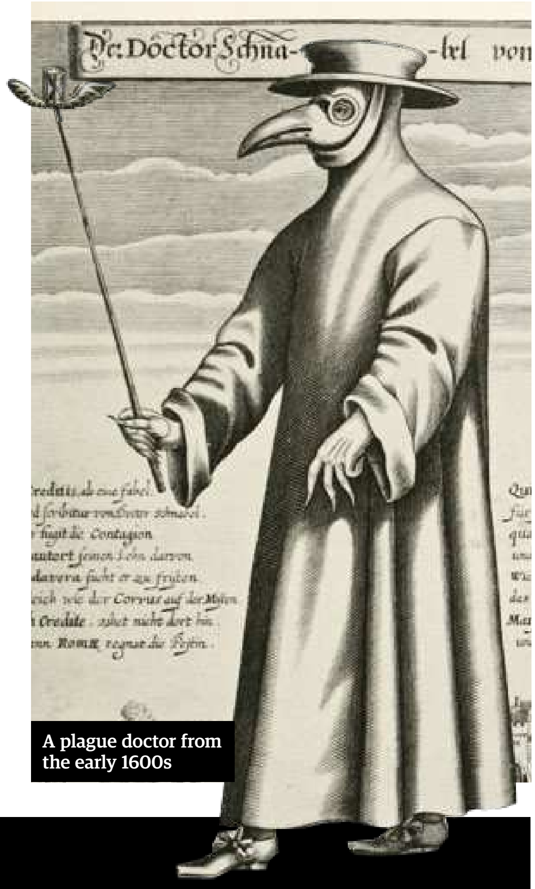
In 1346, amid reports from the east of biblical plagues – rains of frogs and serpents, hail, stinking smoke and thunder – the Mongols of the Golden Horde attacked Caffa – an island port off the north coast of the Black Sea. The horde laid siege to the city and were all set for a protracted campaign when the Black Death struck them in the back ranks. Suddenly, their army was dying and the siege began to fall apart. What followed is the first known incidence of biological warfare: about to pull back and return to the east, the horde first gathered up the diseased bodies of their dead and catapulted them over the walls of Caffa.

Instantly, Pestilence struck Europe, and though it took around 15 years to cross Asia it would destroy Europe in less than five. As the horde went home, defeated, the Black Death ran around the coast of the Black Sea and straight through the Byzantine Empire (south of modern Bulgaria). By 1347 – just as Joan of England, of the House Plantagenet, was departing Britain to marry Prince Pedro of Castile and form a political alliance – it had arrived on the Mediterranean and struck Messina in Sicily. Here, frightened peasants were beginning to realise that the monster attacked by sea and had started to refuse ships at the port, but it was a case of too little, too late.

Trading ships from Genoa and Constantinople carried the plague to the Italian mainland, where it ran up and down the infected rivers, canals and walkways. By 1348, 600 people were dying each day in Venice; Rhodes, Cyprus and Messina had all fallen. The invasion gathered pace and then punched up into the heart of Europe, striking down 60 per cent of Marseilles' population and half of Paris'. The death toll was so high that the mayor of Bordeaux even set fire to the port, in a remarkably prescient move considering the fact that serpents and smog were more feared than rats at this stage.

Britain fared little better at the time. Arriving on the south coast of England in 1348 – primarily through ports like Bristol, Weymouth and London – the Black Death was to claim 50 per cent of the population and reach a height of around 300 souls each day in London by spring 1349.

It was a staggering loss in this age of arable farming, when the majority of the country's wealth lay in the land. Acres and acres of golden cornfields



A plague doctor from the early 1600s

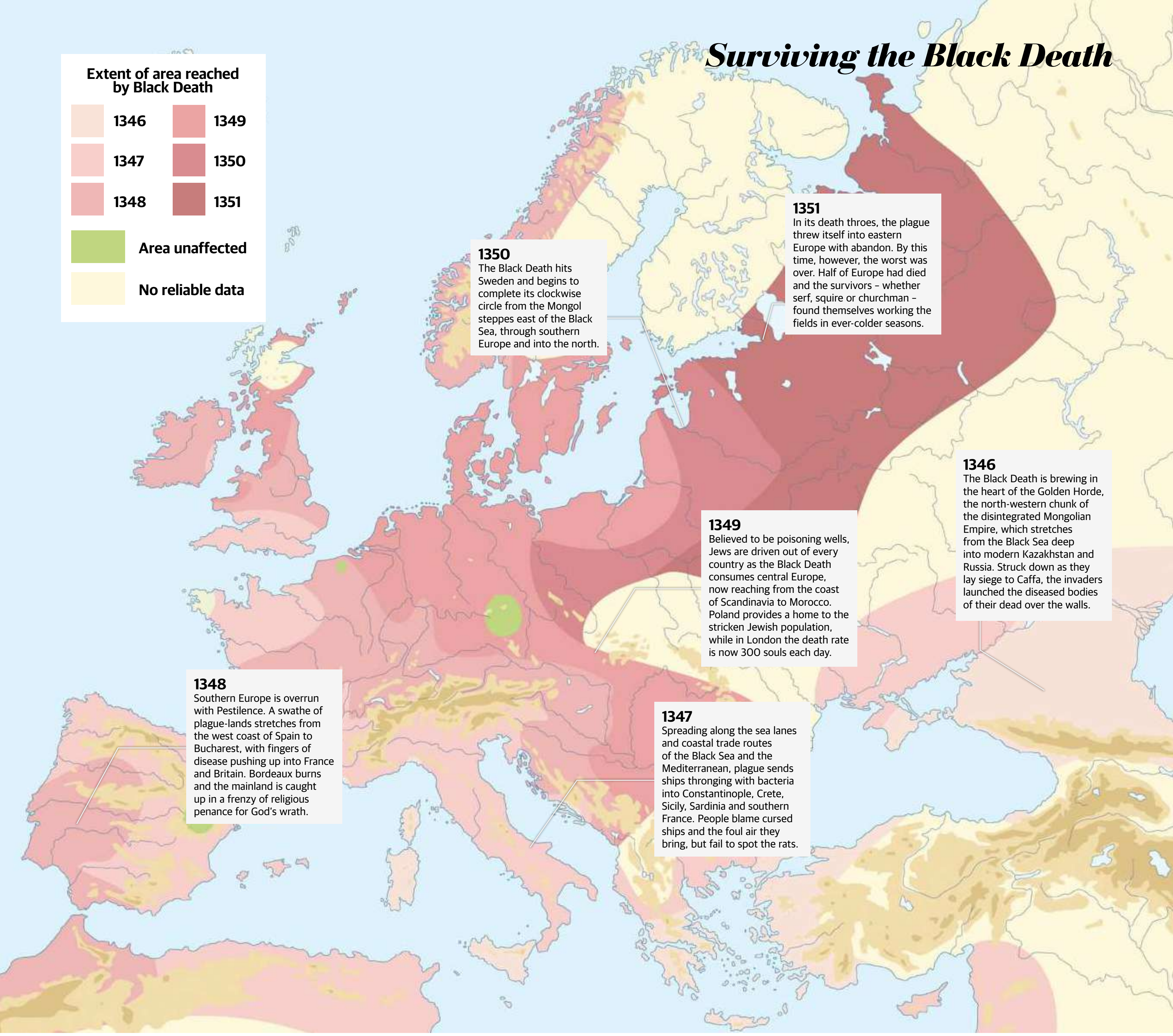
Kill or cure

A number of herbal treatments were thought to be effective against the Black Death. Sufferers were regularly prescribed, depending on their income, solutions of ground emeralds or potions made from the crushed shells of newly laid eggs mixed with chopped marigolds, ale and treacle. Treacle was, in fact, a leading remedy, though it allegedly had to be at least ten years old to have any potency. Another effective, if less appealing, curative was urine – two glasses a day was widely thought to strengthen the constitution and fend off disease.

Treatment of the buboes was a trickier affair. In their terror, people believed they could draw out Pestilence by holding bread against the boils and burying it – or, more incredibly, by strapping a live hen to the swelling, rinsing and repeating. Physicians later discovered that lancing buboes, draining the pus and applying poultices was relatively effective in the affliction's early stages. Such poultices usually consisted of tree resin, white lily root and then dried human excrement, arsenic or dried toad, depending on availability. Less extreme ointments were mixed from cooked onions, butter and garlic, while bloodletting through leeches or incisions and the application of clay and violets was also practised.

For the most part, since the Black Death was allegedly miasmatic, the best preventative measure was thought to be carrying pouches of sweet herbs and spices (or balls of perfume called pomanders), and burning them in your home. Most felt their only options were to fast, pray and join the Flagellants in order to do penance for their sins, and kill suspected witches or well-poisoners, while waiting for Saturn to move out of the House of Jupiter.

Surviving the Black Death



1350
The Black Death hits Sweden and begins to complete its clockwise circle from the Mongol steppes east of the Black Sea, through southern Europe and into the north.

1351
In its death throes, the plague threw itself into eastern Europe with abandon. By this time, however, the worst was over. Half of Europe had died and the survivors – whether serf, squire or churchman – found themselves working the fields in ever-colder seasons.

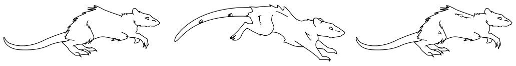
1346
The Black Death is brewing in the heart of the Golden Horde, the north-western chunk of the disintegrated Mongolian Empire, which stretches from the Black Sea deep into modern Kazakhstan and Russia. Struck down as they lay siege to Caffa, the invaders launched the diseased bodies of their dead over the walls.

1349
Believed to be poisoning wells, Jews are driven out of every country as the Black Death consumes central Europe, now reaching from the coast of Scandinavia to Morocco. Poland provides a home to the stricken Jewish population, while in London the death rate is now 300 souls each day.

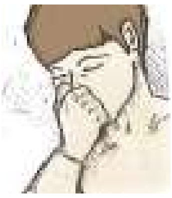
1348
Southern Europe is overrun with Pestilence. A swathe of plague-lands stretches from the west coast of Spain to Bucharest, with fingers of disease pushing up into France and Britain. Bordeaux burns and the mainland is caught up in a frenzy of religious penance for God's wrath.

1347
Spreading along the sea lanes and coastal trade routes of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, plague sends ships thronging with bacteria into Constantinople, Crete, Sicily, Sardinia and southern France. People blame cursed ships and the foul air they bring, but fail to spot the rats.

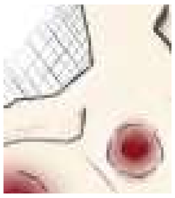
When pestilence strikes…



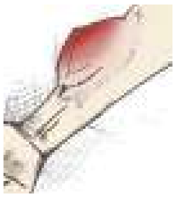
Flu hits
The Black Death begins like a bad cold, with aches, pains, chills and a fever setting in.



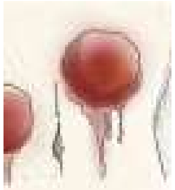
God's tokens
Just a few hours later, circular red rashes appear around infected lymph nodes.



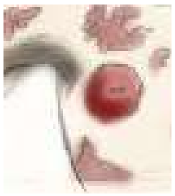
Bubo breakout
Within a day or two, the lymph nodes blacken and swell to the size of oranges.



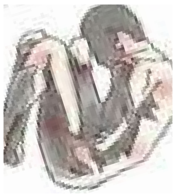
Vomiting
Severe fluid loss, including blood, accompanies and exacerbates the bloating buboes.



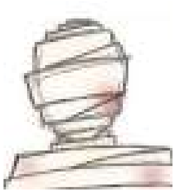
Septic shock
Two to three days after infection, septic shock and pneumonia often hit the victim.

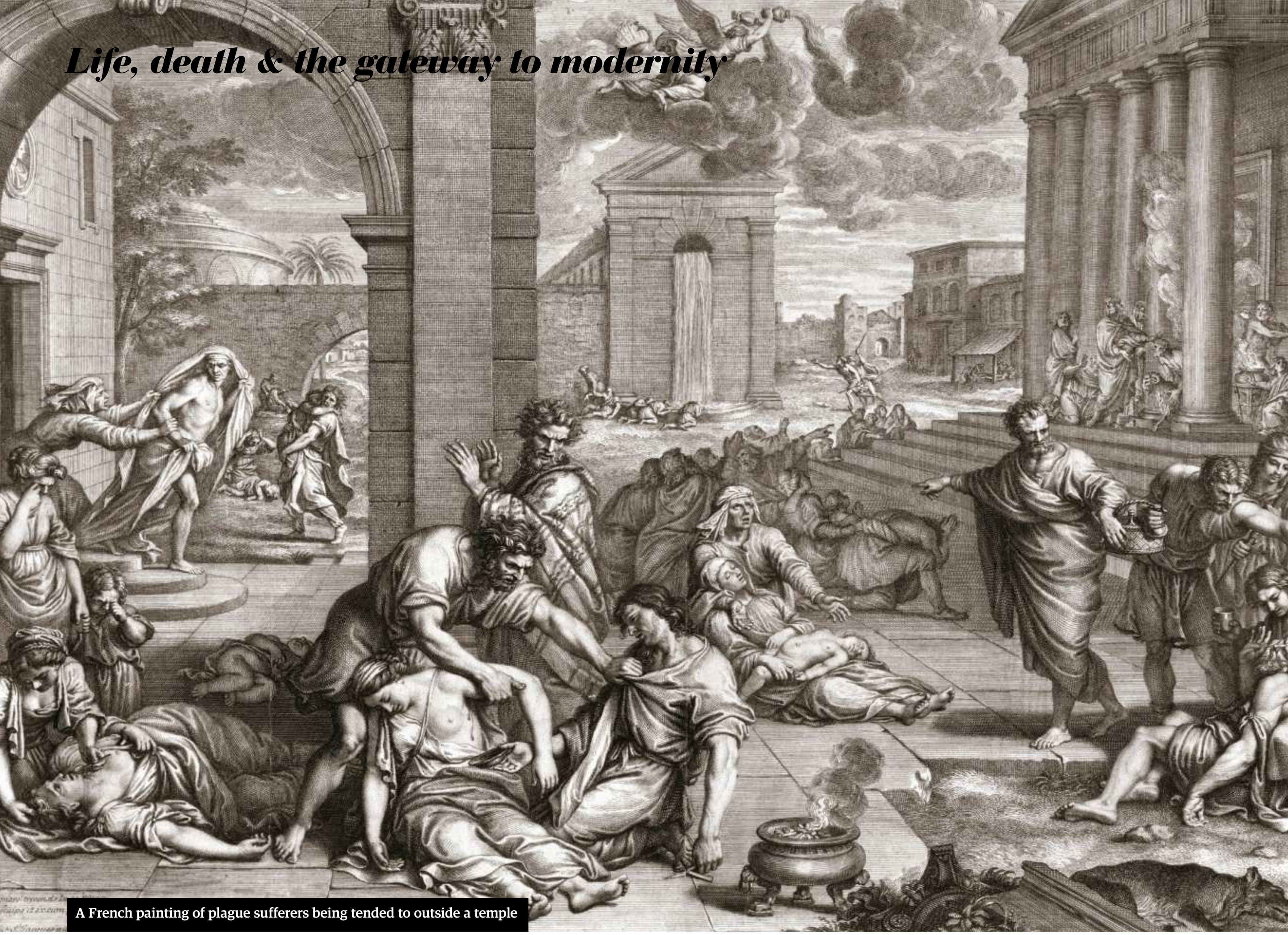


Respiratory failure
Weakened under the assault, the body's central systems begin to shut down.



Death
Usually within two to four days, pestilence conquers the host.





A French painting of plague sufferers being tended to outside a temple

"With the death rate increasing and spinsters gobbling up inheritances, lords were as out of pocket as the poor"

were left without farmers to sow or plough them; knights and churchmen found themselves working by the sweat of their brows – and this led to the growth of the new yeoman class, as serf-less landowners were forced to rent their estates to the surviving farmers, whose labour was now very much in demand against crippling inflation and who became independent for the first time. This freed up capital and made it more economically mobile, possibly leading to the birth of a kind of proto-capitalism, but it also led to the proliferation of English 'lost villages'.

As well as being depopulated through disease, the estates of the rich also succumbed to the fat dowers of widows who were entitled, for life, to a third of their dead spouse's income. With the death rate increasing and ageing women gobbling up inheritances, young lords were as out of pocket as the poor and stood no better chance against Pestilence. While the chronic overpopulation in England before the Black Death meant that there was no initial effect on the labour market, by the next generation – the 1370s – there was a critical shortage. This led to the British government passing increasingly stringent regulations aimed at holding down rising wages, and ultimately to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The same was true elsewhere in Europe, with the effects of the Black Death also leading to the Jacquerie in France (1358) and the Revolt of the Ciompi in Italy (1378).

Despite the reassurance that the clergy provided, religion was powerless against the Black Death. Churchmen, who were often the closest thing to a doctor, were forbidden to dissect the bodies God made and so could not perform autopsies to learn the exact causes of death. Priests afraid of the plague refused to administer last rites, and urged people to confess to each other. Funeral rites were similarly abandoned, with corpses stacked several layers deep with a smattering of earth between each row, and entrepreneurial peasants began to gather and bury the dead for a fee.

Eventually, the clergy refused bodies entry into cities and, since death had become such a constant companion, ordained that no funeral bells were to ring. In 1348, however, a much greater religious threat abounded. The Brotherhood of Flagellants rose up in Germany and led 1,000-strong marches through the country for 33 and a half days at a time (to mark the Saviour's years on Earth), brutally whipping themselves with iron-studded belts of leather to display their penance to God and earn protection from his wrath. They had something of a rock-star status and many people reached out to catch the sacred drops of blood that spattered from their holy wounds.

By 1349 the movement had petered out – falling prey to a bandwagon effect that led to too many misfits and vagabonds exploiting the Flagellants' notoriety – but the effect it had on public sentiment was grave. The reinforcement of extreme Christian ideology in the face of the apocalypse inflamed anti-Semitism across Europe and the Jews were persecuted like never before.

Associated as they were with the mystical Kabbalah (and black magic), the 2.5 million Jews living in Europe at the time were prime suspects for witchcraft and nefarious deeds. Having been strong international merchants in 1000, they were in a period of decline that would ultimately lead to their replacement in economic terms by Italian merchants by 1500. Divided and wandering across Europe, they were accused of brewing poisons from basilisk skin, spiders, lizards and frogs – even Christian hearts and the wafer of Christ – and then infecting wells with disease.

False confessions under torture, such as that of Agimet the Jew during the plague's peak in 1348, certainly didn't help matters, and on Valentine's Day of 1349 in Strasbourg 2,000 Jews were burned in a cemetery. The crime was repeated in other cities across Germany and Switzerland, prompting a mass Jewish migration across Europe.

It was to Poland that they fled, as King Casimir was in love with a Jewish woman and so opened the borders of his country to his lover's kinsmen, where they would remain until the Holocaust. Yet while the Jews were fleeing death and destruction at the hands of humans, the monster itself was winding down. Pestilence reached Sweden in 1350 and, by the time it got to Russia, the plague had all but passed in France and England.

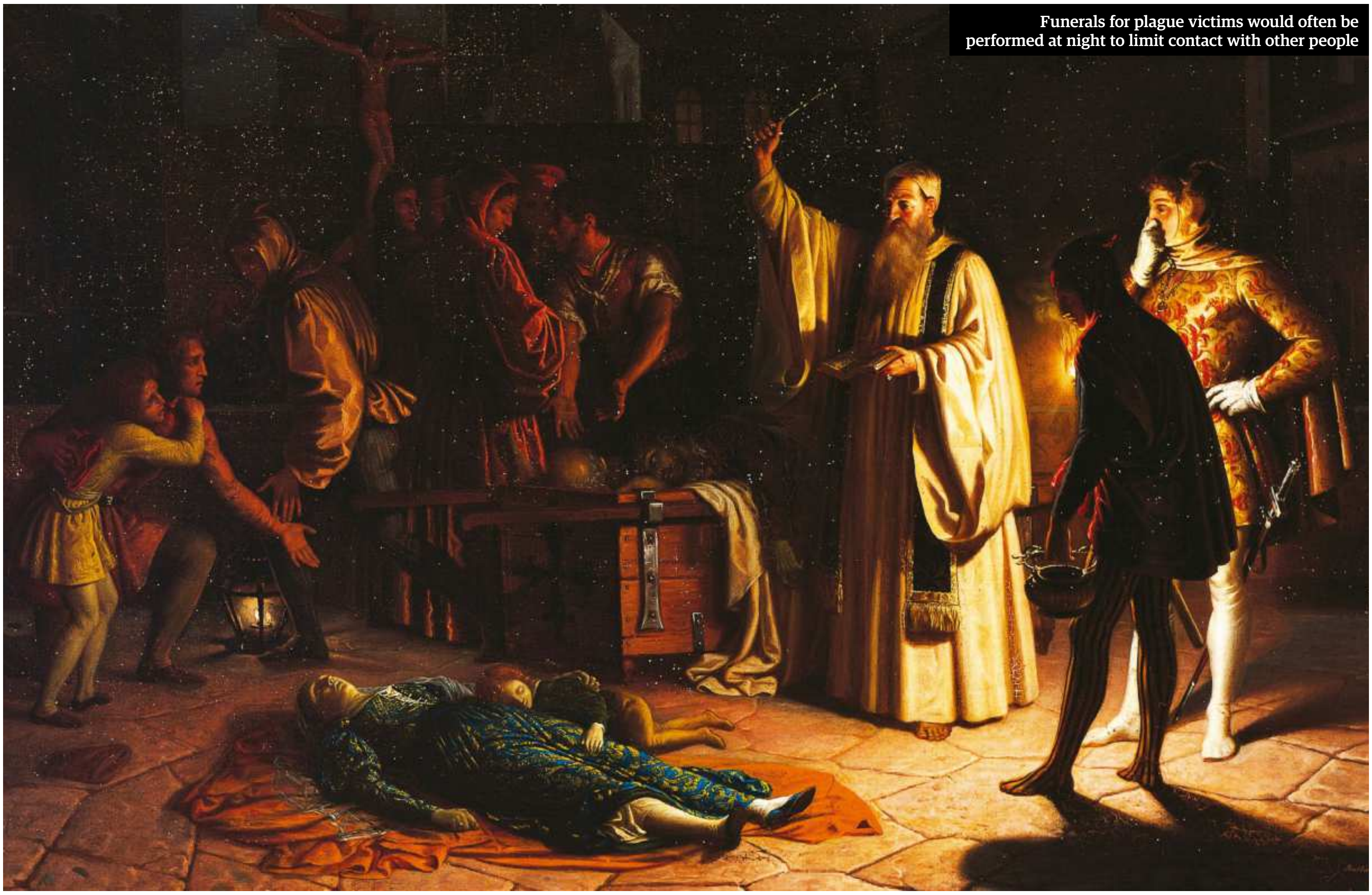
Historians have never reached complete agreement on what exactly stopped the disease, though quarantines, slightly better hygiene and the reduced number of people travelling back and forth through Europe – as a result of mass depopulation and a growing fear of infected trade routes – are all thought to have played a role. The plague had claimed an estimated 40-50 per cent of the European population – that's around 20 million people. By way of comparison, the Spanish Flu that followed the end of WWI in 1918 – raging across a far more populous Europe – claimed 50 million lives. Never before or since has such a potent infection wracked the Continent.

> "The plague had claimed an estimated 40 to 50 per cent of the European population – around 20 million people"

There is a nursery rhyme still sung today that is believed by some (although folklorists strongly disagree) to bear the terrible mark of the plague, an unconscious testament to the deep psychological impact it had upon the survivors: 'Ring a-ring a-roses; a pocketful of posies; ashes, ashes; we all fall down!'. In the early stages of the plague, the afflicted were known to develop rosy red rashes on the skin in the shape of a ring, and 'posies' – nosegays of dried flowers, or small pouches of sweet-smelling herbs – were often carried to ward off the disease. Unaware of the true nature of the monster, many believed the Black Death was a miasmatic illness, caused by noxious fumes in the air. As such, posies were carried and incense burned in homes, people forwent bathing (as it opened the pores) and even splashed themselves in urine to bolster their natural protection against external fumes and vapours. It is argued that the first two lines of the rhyme refer to this.

As for the closing lines, historians believe that the Great Fire of London (1666) – which wiped out the black rats – was the only thing that saved England from succumbing entirely. It took Europe 150 years to fully recover, and those who survived believed they had witnessed the apocalypse.

With war, death and famine also rampant in the century following the Black Death, it was as if the four horsemen themselves had ridden out in force to bring the whole of Europe to its knees. To a highly superstitious, God-fearing populace, it was a hell on Earth that they were utterly powerless to defend themselves against, and which would never be forgotten.



Funerals for plague victims would often be performed at night to limit contact with other people

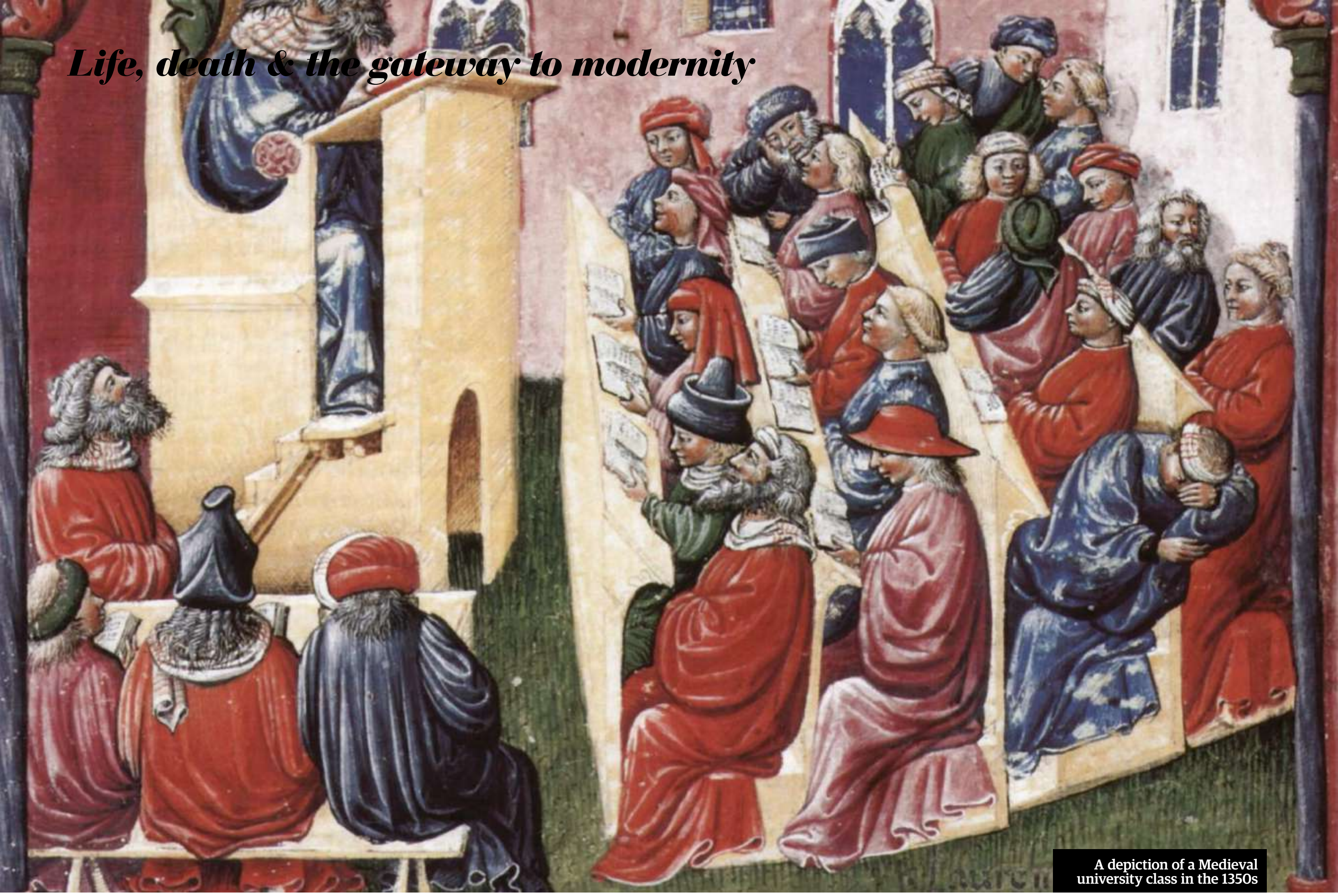
How the Medieval era changed the world

From the printing press to the longbow, the Middle Ages hauled civilisation out of the ancient era and into the modern age

The fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 changed Europe drastically, as Odoacer overthrew the last Western emperor, Romulus Augustulus. Centuries of centralised rule orchestrated from Rome came crashing down as the likes of the Visigoths, Vandals, Franks, Saxons and Vikings began to exert their influence. The era is known by many as a time when bloodthirsty barbarian hordes rampaged across the land and the Catholic Church called all the religious and political shots in a time known as the Dark Ages. While there was a decline in social order after the removal of the grandeur and structures of the Roman Empire, the era from the fall of the Romans to the birth of the Renaissance was vital to the growth of the old world. The new inhabitants of Europe were colonisers as well as invaders.

The progress of the Middle Ages was spread across a wide spectrum. The sheer number of wars over territory and religion meant military techniques advanced drastically. The Crusades, for instance, brought western European society into contact with the Islamic world and the Byzantine Empire, which were both experiencing golden eras of progress. There were also advancements in society, medicine and economics as communities progressed despite bloodshed in wars and loss of life in deadly epidemics like the Black Death, which killed over 75 million people. With the breaking up of the Roman Empire, cultural identities emerged and many regions began to establish ethnic and social conventions that they would be known by for years to come. By the time of the Renaissance, the Medieval world had successfully left the era of classical antiquity behind as populations began to grow, social conventions were put in place, cities prospered and the foundations of modern nations were created. The path to the discovery of the New World and an era of European colonial expansion beckoned.

Europe's total population almost doubled between 1000 and 1350 and even tripled in some areas



A depiction of a Medieval university class in the 1350s

Science and technology

Discover the Medieval inventions that helped progress the Western world from the shadow of the Roman Empire to the enlightenment of the Renaissance

The feudal system was effective throughout the Middle Ages and led to a multitude of inventions, both developments from ancient ideas and completely new devices. As populations began to expand and the slave force that dominated the Roman world became non-existent, there was a constant need for food. The heavy plough was one invention that transformed the agricultural world as it allowed heavier soils such as those in northern Europe to be turned into arable farmland. This invaluable development, along with the horse collar, crop rotation and windmills, greatly helped food production while the invention of the tidal mill supplied clean, drinkable water in reservoirs and demonstrated the growth of Medieval knowledge during the period. These inventions would become invaluable during the Black Death and the Great Famine of 1315-1317.

An invention that is now commonplace but was revolutionary in the Middle Ages was the mechanical clock. Developed in the 13th century, weights drove the device and it would produce a sound on the hour rather than telling the exact time of day. Another creation that would be vital as time progressed was the printing press. Invented in the 1440s by Johannes Gutenberg, the printing press allowed texts to be mass-produced, meaning culture and knowledge could be spread much quicker than ever before. Printing technology benefitted from the earlier invention of the spinning wheel, which had already increased the production of cloth.

Something not usually associated with the era are glasses, but many claim that the first optical lenses were recorded in 1268 by Friar Roger Bacon. Building on the science behind the first mirrors, these early ideas of optical science were initially only known by monks, but they were picked up by more and more scholars and, along with the printing press, represented the spread of learning to more social classes than ever before.

40,000 books had been printed in 14 European countries by 1500 thanks to the technology of the printing press

The importance of the Church meant that the Bible was the first port of call for knowledge but universities as well as monasteries acted as centres of learning. The University of Bologna in Italy is believed to be one of the first in the world after it opened in the 11th century, and the teaching of theology, law, medicine and letters helped grow an educated class and a bourgeoisie. Even away from universities, the peasantry was becoming more skilled, with trades such as leatherwork and metalwork flourishing. Blacksmiths in particular helped fuel the fledgling mining industry and the Middle Ages saw renewed interest in coal mining, which would later help alleviate the reliance on wood burning, especially in Britain, which experienced an energy crisis in the 16th century. As well as European inventions, devices from China such as the compass and the rudder were incorporated and used, which made travel and conquest significantly easier and quicker.

Wars and weaponry

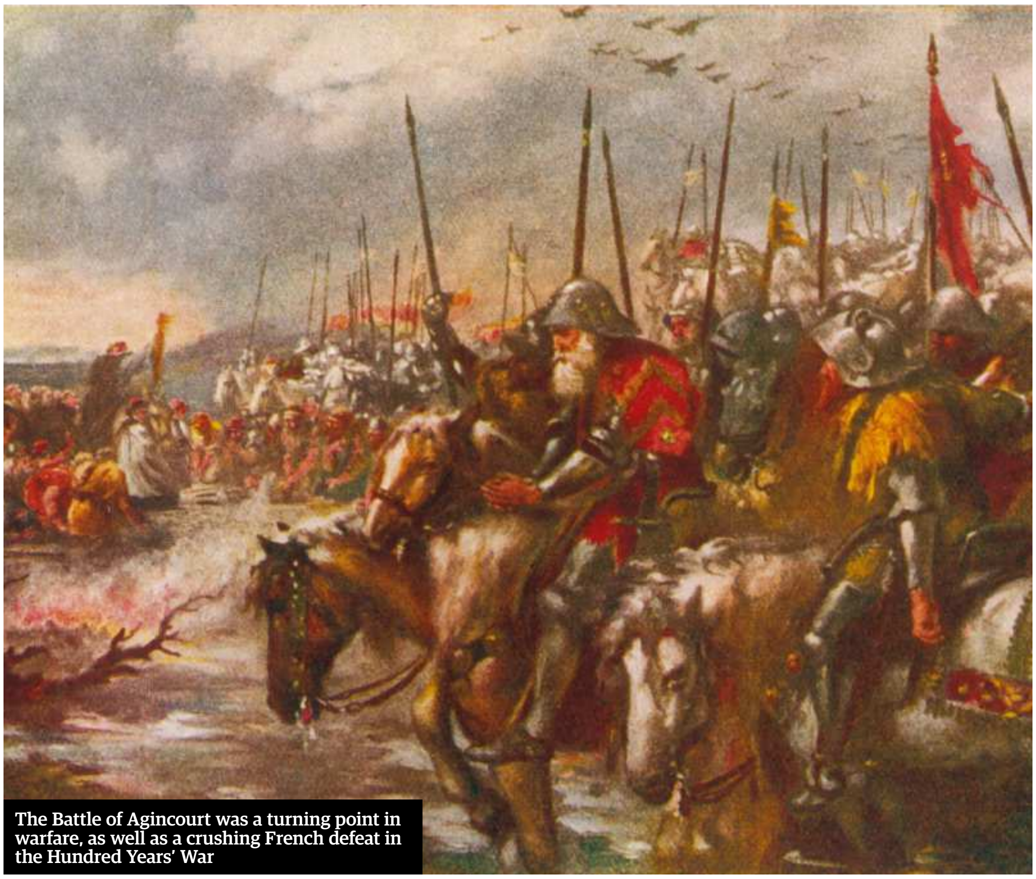
The field of battle was revolutionised in the Medieval era, from plate armour to the very first firearms

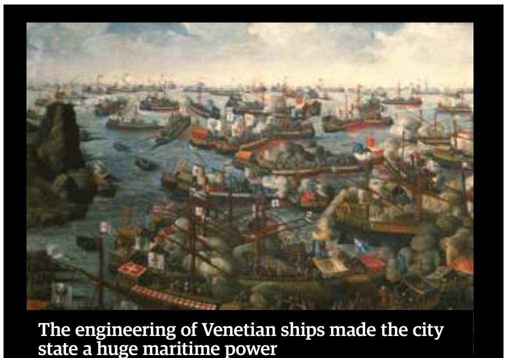
The Middle Ages were packed full of wars, campaigns and skirmishes. For the first time, cavalry was used on a wide scale and knights on horseback and clad in plate armour were the tanks of the Medieval battlefield. The horse became a military must-have, trampling infantry and rushing crossbowmen. Their impact was strengthened with the mainstream adoption of the horseshoe, which increased the beast's power on the battlefield, and stirrups that helped prevent the rider from falling.

One of the major conflicts of the era was the Hundred Years' War, which raged on and off from 1337 to 1453 and was famous for the longbow. Wielded by Welsh and English archers, it offered much faster shooting than the crossbow and helped decrease the use of heavy cavalry on the battlefield as the arrowheads pierced both chain mail and plate armour. In future post-Middle Ages conflicts such as the Thirty Years' War (which is still one of the most devastating wars in history) in the 17th century, light cavalry was used much more prominently and the first firearms called arquebuses were wielded. They proved clumsy, slow and at times ineffectual, but provided a template and an insight into the future of warfare.

Arquebuses and other primitive firearms were developments of Middle Age weapons like the cannon. Gunpowder was first brought to Europe from the East in the 14th century and would change the battlefield forever. Prior to cannons, assaults on castles and walled cities were conducted by siege weapons such as trebuchets and rams, while the attackers also used more tactical methods such as mining under walls, starving cities and spreading disease within the castle. Gunpowder helped change all of this as battlements were blasted to smithereens. This resulted in the building of stronger concentric castles and the development of cities, as well as larger cannons like the great bombards invented in the early days of the Ottoman Empire.

Many of these new weapons would not have been available if wasn't for a significant progression in metallurgy. Improving on techniques first used in the Iron Age, swords, axes and arrowheads were made stronger and sharper for stronger blows and deeper impacts. This was done by using a blast furnace, which could churn out weaponry of a better quality. Armies were now much larger than ever before and a new era of warfare beckoned.


The Battle of Agincourt was a turning point in warfare, as well as a crushing French defeat in the Hundred Years' War


The engineering of Venetian ships made the city state a huge maritime power

Transport and trade

With no centralised government, people explored far and wide

Europe in the Middle Ages was a society of keen travellers. Whether it was in search of riches, finding living space or escaping pursuers, the borders to different territories were nearly always open. The Carolingian Empire aside, there wasn't any major form of centralised government, so factions were always on the move. Perhaps the greatest movers were the Vikings, who occupied land from the Iberian Peninsula to Constantinople and even reached the New World before anyone else. This was achieved through the use of the iconic longship, which was so well engineered that it had the endurance and the resources to cross the Atlantic, as well as being equally adept in rivers to launch quick raids. The success of the Vikings going west was equalled to the east by Marco Polo. The Italian merchant's journey from 1271 to 1295 strengthened European links with China and gave the West knowledge of silk, resulting in more traffic on the legendary Silk Road.

The road network of Europe was poorly developed and relied primarily on old Roman roads and tracks. Horseback was the best mode of transport, while the rich travelled in litters or carts. The most progress was made on water, with the combination of new rudders, sails and compasses making maritime travel very efficient. These progressions – along with improved equipment like navigational charts, anchors and sea provisions – dragged sea travel out of the lull it had been in since the days of Roman galleys and forward to armadas full of galleons, caravels and fluyts. European navies would dominate across the oceans of the globe in both exploration and war.

Society and law

With the feudal system in place there was an established yet unbalanced system of law and order in Europe

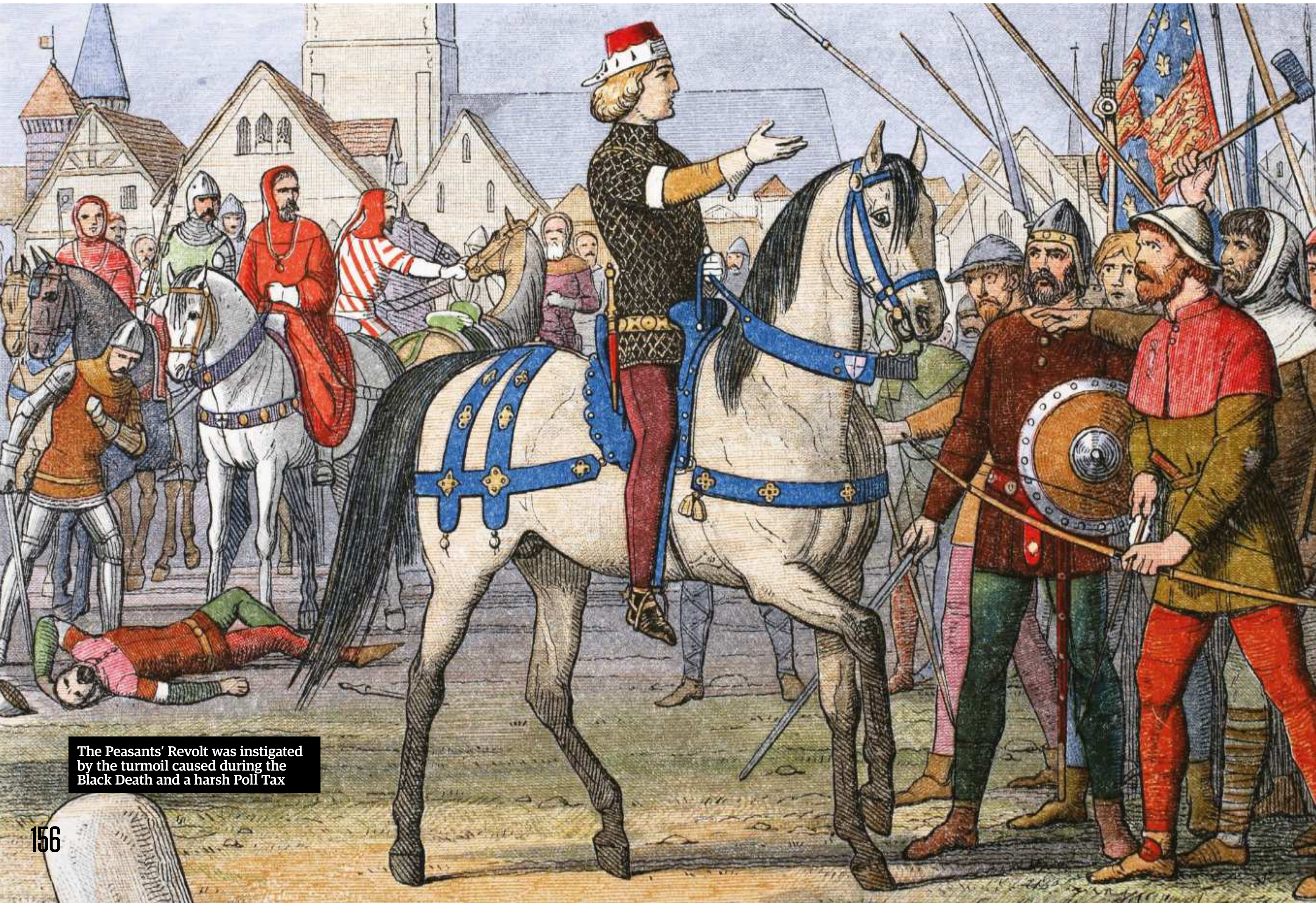
Medieval Europe was dominated by the feudal system. A monarch was top of the tree and was supported by barons and knights, who in turn protected and ordered the peasantry, who were divided into skilled and non-skilled workers. Communities gathered around a lord who resided in a manor or castle at the centre of a town and gave them protection in return for working the fields.

The peasants, or serfs, had limited rights but the nobility often pressured the monarch into making rules and regulations. In England, for instance, King John was forced to sign *Magna Carta* in 1215, which limited the king's power over taxes and forced him to hold trials. This was a turning point as it was the first time a king's power had been governed by law. Over a century later, the Peasants' Revolt of June 1381 tore England apart as a peasant army marched on London. They were incensed at how the Black Death and the introduction of the Poll Tax to fund the costly Hundred Years' War had depleted their quality of life. The revolt didn't change much for the peasantry initially, but the Poll Tax was later abolished and it sent shockwaves to the nobility about the power of a united population against the elite.

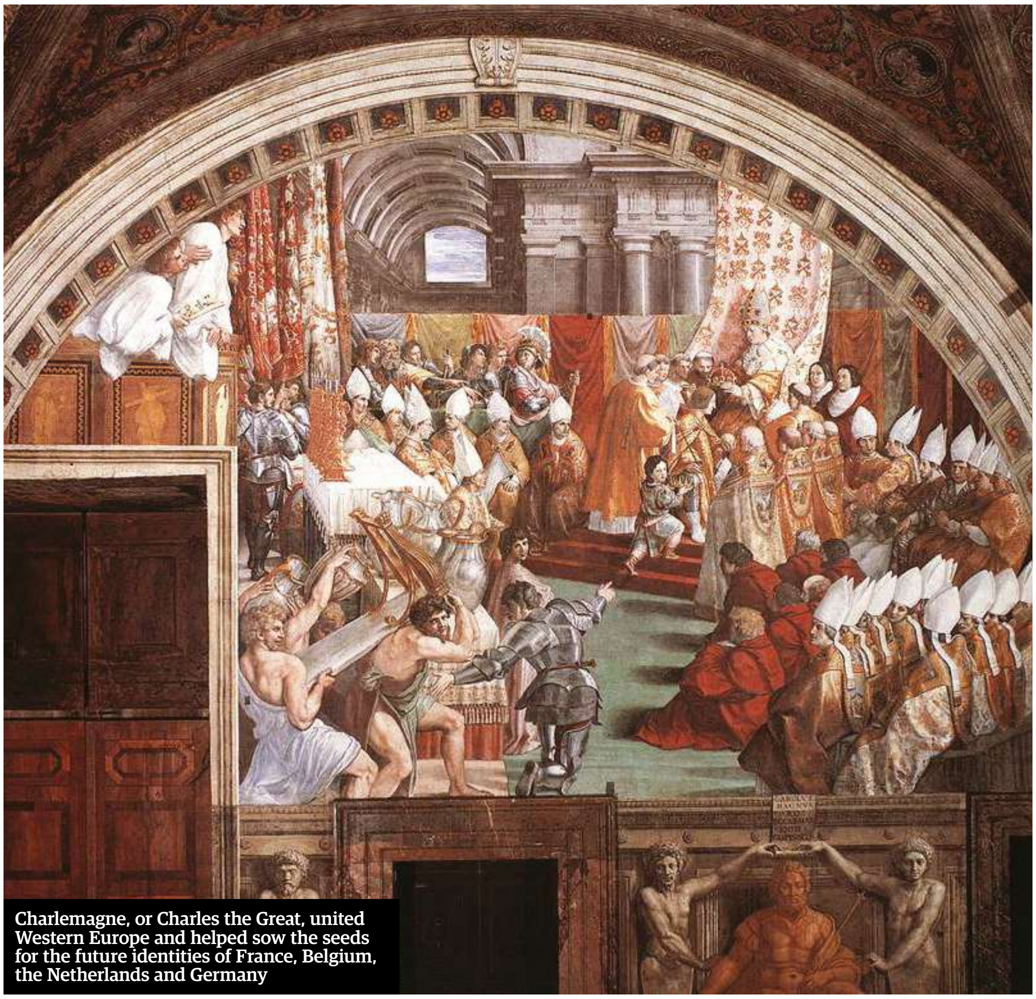
> Though it had mostly died out in Europe by the end of the 15th century, serfdom wasn't abolished in Russia until 1861

A woman's role in society was considered inferior to that of a man's but they still maintained a key role in Medieval life. Many were skilled just like men in hunting, medicine, toolmaking or playing music and the era had many famous female names such as Joan of Arc and Eleanor of Aquitaine. One institution that was often above the law was the Church. Religion played a major part in Medieval life and the Catholic Church was the dominant institution up until the Reformation. The money that poured into the Church allowed it to teach Latin and play a major role in government as well as constructing huge cathedrals, the most impressive buildings of the age.

Towards the end of the Medieval era, the effects of the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses had changed society, giving the Church and the feudal system less power as the Reformation and the Renaissance came into view. Government was pretty much non-existent – at least as the institution we know it as today – but the Medieval communes did give men the vote with annual elections for councillors.



The Peasants' Revolt was instigated by the turmoil caused during the Black Death and a harsh Poll Tax



Charlemagne, or Charles the Great, united Western Europe and helped sow the seeds for the future identities of France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany

The Carolingian Renaissance

Charlemagne's Frankish Empire was the powerhouse of Western Europe and heralded a new period of learning

The classic 'Renaissance' is believed to have been kickstarted at the end of the Middle Ages but there were periods of enlightenment before this accepted period of rebirth occurred. The most prominent was the Carolingian Renaissance led by the famous king of the Franks, Charlemagne, who promoted policies that revived art, education and culture.

For instance, in 789 the emperor ruled that every monastery must have a school for boys, as he believed there was a growing neglect for learning in the realm he ruled. These reforms introduced an increased copying of texts, which was the quickest method of distribution before the invention of the printing press centuries later. Charlemagne's capital was in Aix-la-Chapelle (modern day Aachen) and his palace was modelled in a Romanesque style that recalled the days of Rome. His empire frequently traded with Vikings and Saxons in the North Sea, giving the Franks access to swords, pottery and glass, and they also traded southwards with Venetian merchants. Perhaps the longest lasting effect was the standardisation of the French currency. The monarchy controlled all the empire's mints and the system was so good that it was then adopted in England by King Offa of Mercia, where the structures remained in place until the 20th century.

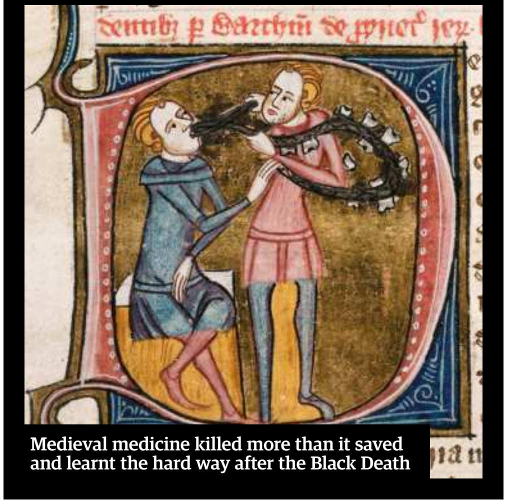
The new network of education may only have been available for a small group of nobles in the upper classes, but in time this would filter down to other levels of society. After Charlemagne's death in 814, his empire became fractured and the Middle Age learning curve dipped once more. However, the emperor's work had been done and this short period of enlightenment became the basis for growth in Western Europe.

Medicine

The Black Death hit Medieval Europe hard, but it helped usher in progress in medicine in the long term

Middle Age medicine was completely unprepared for the considerable carnage that was caused by the Black Death, but benefitted from the knowledge learnt during the outbreak. The largest epidemic in Europe was the two dark years of 1348 and 1350, when an estimated 1.5 million died in England alone. Quarantines were first introduced in the Republic of Ragusa (now Dubrovnik, Croatia) in 1377 and involved keeping the infected away from the public, reducing the spread of diseases in the process. Although this was based on the false idea of miasmas, which stated that disease was spread by poisonous airborne vapours, it did minimise casualties and opened the door for further scientific thought into medicine, culminating in Louis Pasteur's germ theory in the 19th century.

Nonetheless, medicine was generally poor in the Medieval era as towns were often filthy and illness and disease were rampant. Cures such as trepanning and bloodletting often made things worse, as did a blind devotion to religion to cure people of their ills. Personal hygiene and the knowledge of medicine was much improved in both the Islamic World and the Byzantine Empire. The former had hospitals called Bimaristans in its major cities and *Al-Hawi*, a 30 volume medical encyclopedia, while the latter had, in its capital Constantinople, xenon, which acted as hospitals and shelters and ensured patients were given the best facilities available.



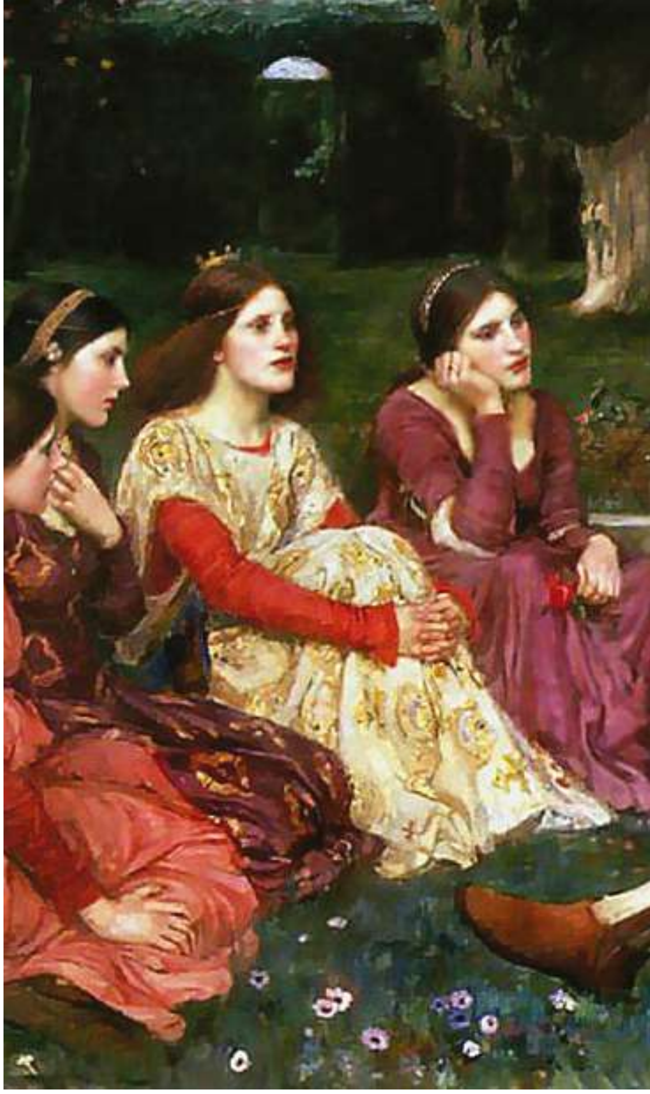
Medieval medicine killed more than it saved and learnt the hard way after the Black Death

The written word

The work of Chaucer and other literature was a giant leap forward in Europe's capability to read and write

Chaucer achieved fame during his lifetime, and was the first poet to be buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey

Prior to the Carolingian Empire, all scripts, both Greek and Roman, were written in all-capital letters without any spaces. This all changed in the 9th century when both lower case letters and spaces were introduced in the Carolingian Miniscule. A huge leap forward in calligraphy, it was part of Charlemagne's educational reforms and still forms the basis of words and sentences today. The addition of the printing press in the 15th century saw the first punctuation being used as the written word spread over Europe, helping more to learn to read and write. In England the major text of the period was Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The text is an epic poem about a group of pilgrims on a journey to Canterbury Cathedral and was one of the first to be written in English, allowing the general public, who weren't fluent in Latin or French, to read it. It is believed that the book is responsible for the first inclusion of many English words used today and set the bar for future English literature and the idea of characters being relatable to the readers who encountered them. Another first in the Medieval era was illustrations in books. Most ancient illustrations were diagrams, but in the Middle Ages pictorial images to supplement text became the norm. The use of illustrations helped those who were illiterate to understand books and were undoubtedly a precursor to the images in newspapers, books and magazines that we read and enjoy now.



Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* revolved around English life and was one of the first texts that had relatable characters

Money and economics

The birth of banking and urbanisation can be traced back to the Middle Ages

Bankers have a lot to thank the Middle Ages for. Banking, as we know it today, was first started in the Medieval era. Bills of exchange were created to prevent coinage being carried over long and possibly treacherous journeys and there was even deposit banking which was very similar to the bonds and savings accounts we put our money away in for safe keeping in the 21st century. Once again the Hundred Years' War was instrumental in this development, and the cost of the lengthy war resulted in the first type of government bonds to help keep the economy afloat after the impact of severe debts.

The dual increase in the economy and public health helped feed growing urbanisation. Cities like London, Paris and Milan first reached prominence in the Middle Ages and Constantinople had a population of as many as 800,000 people by the 10th century. The rapid construction of towns and cities was instigated by the invention of the wheelbarrow in the 1170s, the increasing talent

Where previously stories had been memorised and recited, now they began to be written down and illustrated

of stonemasons and the Artesian Well, which allowed water to be forced from the ground without resorting to pumping. The Black Death actually helped the economy in the long term as labour shortages meant the survivors could choose which baron they worked for. Consequently lords battled over conditions, increasing the importance of serfs in society. A negative effect of the Black Death was the blame culture prompted by the epidemic. Faith in organized religion took a nose dive after praying had seemingly no effect on reducing the pain of the buboes, but Christians took to blaming the Jews for their woes. The Jewish population fled to Eastern Europe where they remained until the rise of Nazism and the horrors of the Holocaust.

AROLVS IMP AVG

Culture

From cathedrals to music, Medieval societies weren't shy in expressing themselves

The Islamic World was leagues ahead of western Europe for a time and this even extended into having fun. Chess was first played in India in the 6th century but spread through Persia until it reached Europe in the 15th century and evolved into the board and pieces we know today. Oil painting was first done in the Medieval era with Flemish painter Jan van Eyck the first to pioneer it. His work was some of the first known Renaissance painting and would influence generations of great European painters. Music also received a boost in complexity as troubadour ballads were worked into multiple part songs.

Even though the Islamic caliphates were ahead of Europe in medicine, the Crusades and the Reconquista showcased Europe's fast-growing military prowess. The Reconquista in particular drove the Muslim Moors out of the Iberian Peninsula and gave Spain an identity it would carry through to become one of the biggest empires in the world. Roman ideas continued to have an influence in the early Medieval world, especially in architecture, where the Romanesque aesthetic was seen all over Europe in abbeys, churches and monasteries. By the 12th century, this had changed to a more Gothic style, which can be seen today in some of the most impressive cathedrals in Europe. Paris, Cologne, Salisbury and Reims all include flying buttresses and vaulted ribs, allowing engineers to build higher structures and more impressive stained glass windows.

Islamic and Byzantine art was heavily influential in the paintings and architecture of Medieval Europe

The Saint-Chapelle is a prime example of the dramatic Gothic architecture that flourished in the Middle Ages

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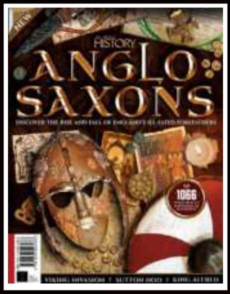
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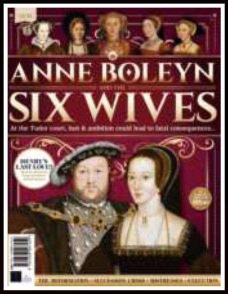
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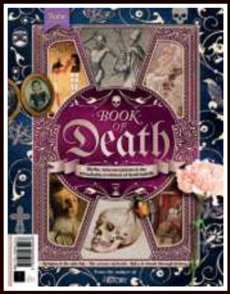
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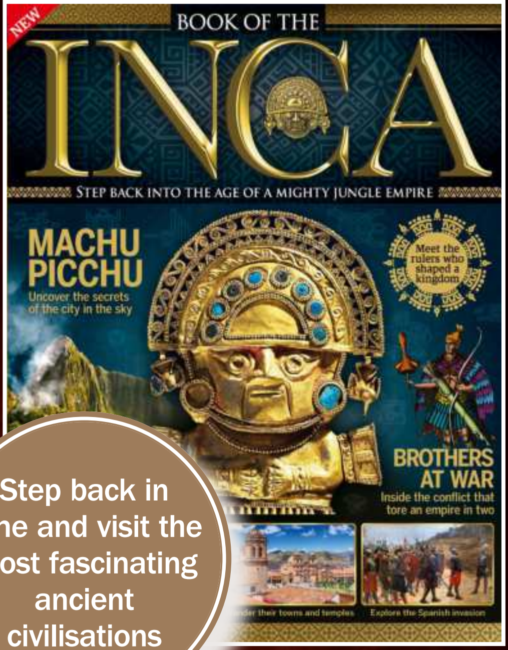
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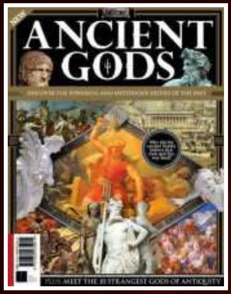
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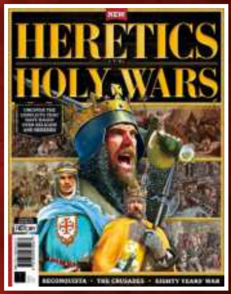
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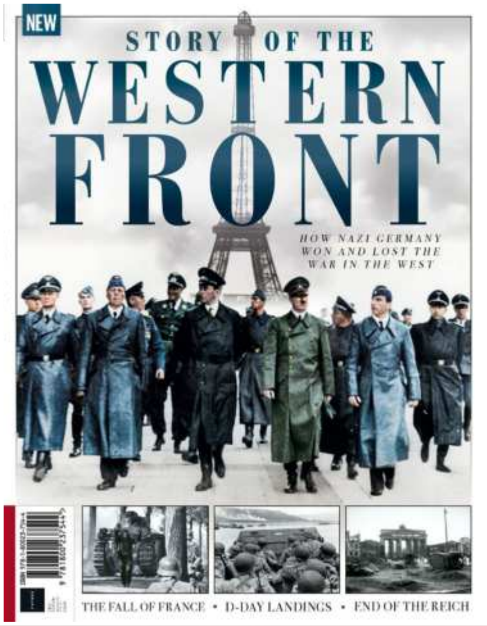
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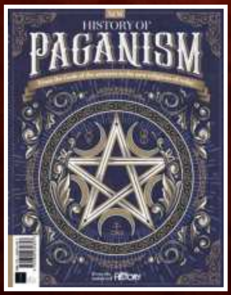
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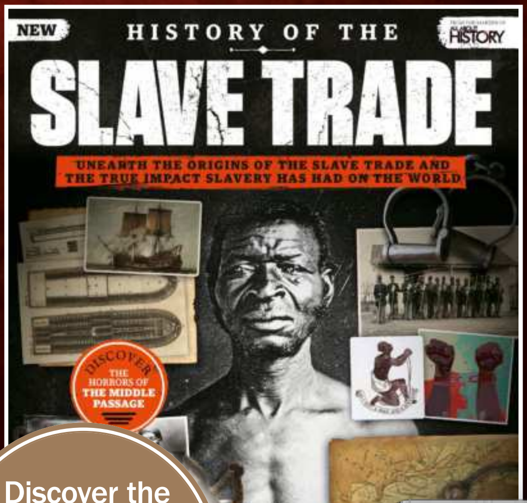
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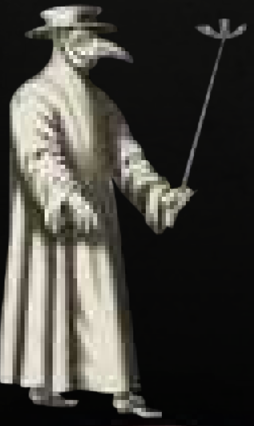

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